Abolishing Capitalist Totality

Edited by Anthony Iles & Mattin

What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?

this poem is a face. A cat's face.

globally,
Would be the solution,
I will rip their massive heads off

And throw them into mass head graves – for indivi -
duals only –
Cos I think that's well-genocidal of them
And beside the point!!!! The point is:

Together, we are already wrinkled,
That's how I knew we were machines,
Not stone!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Capitalism is organic
And we are machines

We can start.

Minor Compositions Open Access Statement – Please Read

This book is open access. This work is not simply an electronic book; it is the open access version of a work that exists in a number of forms, the traditional printed form being one of them.

All Minor Compositions publications are placed for free, in their entirety, on the web. This is because the free and autonomous sharing of knowledges and experiences is important, especially at a time when the restructuring and increased centralization of book distribution makes it difficult (and expensive) to distribute radical texts effectively. The free posting of these texts does not mean that the necessary energy and labor to produce them is no longer there. One can think of buying physical copies not as the purchase of commodities, but as a form of support or solidarity for an approach to knowledge production and engaged research (particularly when purchasing directly from the publisher).

The open access nature of this publication means that you can:
• read and store this document free of charge
• distribute it for personal use free of charge
• print sections of the work for personal use
• read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place

However, it is against the purposes of Minor Compositions open access approach to:
• gain financially from the work
• sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work
• use the work in any commercial activity of any kind
• profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work
• distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within

The intent of Minor Compositions as a project is that any surpluses generated from the use of collectively produced literature are intended to return to further the development and production of further publications and writing: that which comes from the commons will be used to keep cultivating those commons. Omnia sunt communia!

Support Minor Compositions / Purchasing Books
The PDF you are reading is an electronic version of a physical book that can be purchased through booksellers (including online stores), through the normal book supply channels, or Minor Compositions directly. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university or local library purchase a physical printed copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself.

If you have any questions please contact the publisher: minorcompositions@gmail.com.

Abolishing Capitalist Totality:

What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?

Abolishing Capitalist Totality
ISBN 978-1-57027-441-1

Edited by Anthony Iles
and Mattin

Proofreading by Howard Slater,
Marina Vishmidt, David Bremner
and Noah Brehmer

Initial design by Luisa Lorenza Corna

Cover by Luisa Lorenza Corna
with Aziza Ahmad

This book was developed with Archive Books, who carried it through editorial development, layout, and initial proofs. Minor Compositions completed the project and brought it to publication.

Dedicated to our friends
Sean Bonney and Marina Vishmidt

Why do they make a book and why do they gather these texts and publish them with this publisher, on this paper, on the screen, in this software? Why a cover? Why do they have the means to do so? How do they know how to do it? Who are the people to be included, and how does the process of invitation begin? How many times have they done this? Why are they doing it now? Why do the writers agree? Why does the publisher agree? How does the publisher work? Why this publisher and not another? Do they need a publisher? Why a physical book and not a digital file? Why do they write? Who do they write for? How did they learn to write, or how are they learning to write? Do they know each other? Do you know them? Are they alive? How long did it take? How important was the timing of the book? How much does the book cost? What will you do to get it? How much were they paid? How long did it take? How many of them will be printed? How does this book impact their work in general? Will it help them with a visa application? Will it help them with a job? Will it help them find people to talk to? Will it reassure them? How does it relate to other books? How do the writers engage with each other after the book is made? How do they engage with each other's writing? Do the writers know what will be in the book? How do they decide the order or sequence? How do things get edited? What do you need to write? What do you need to read? Will you read this together with friends or alone? Will you contact the editors or writers to say what you thought about it? Are you writing and thinking about similar subjects? Does who they are influence how you feel about the ideas? Does the way they write come before the ideas? Do you only read some of the texts because they are in a form that you like?

Minor Compositions is a series of interventions & provocations drawing from autonomous politics, avant-garde aesthetics, and the revolutions of everyday life.

Minor Compositions is an imprint of Autonomedia

www.minorcompositions.info |
minorcompositions@gmail.com

Released by Minor Compositions 2026

The editors, writers and artists contributing to this book encourage the use of its contents for purposes that are non-commercial, critical or disruptive of capitalist property relations. This legend is devised in the absence of a licence which adequately represents the contributors', editors' and publishers' respective positions on copyright, and to acknowledge but deny the copyrighting performed by default where copyright is waived.

I think I was supposed to die

Loss Choi

Here we are. Ensconced in between
southern / northern lights, shifting ever permanently
like grains of 고운 sand below
below, below the limelight. Salt and pepper
colored necktie on the floor.
Hastily arranged hookups. Forget me,
forgive me; do not
think of me while you die. Invigorating,
invigorating sounds, a great
ocean wave, a rooster coming home.
Shake, shake. Shake your body to
the beat.

<>

Introduction

16 Abolishing Capitalist Totality: What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?
Anthony Iles and Mattin

Historical Materials

56 A Note on Bolívar Echeverría's Reading of Subsumption in Marx
Andrés Saenz De Sicilia

60 Subsumption and Regressive Social Necessity
Bolívar Echeverría

72 Translator's Introduction to Négation, The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work
Federico Corriente

82 The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work
Négation

128 Afterword – Négation: From the Abolition of Labour to the Search for the Subject of the Revolution
Roland Simon

Poetic Interventions

Anne Boyer (back cover), Lisa Jeschke (flaps), Em Hedditch (colophon), Loss Choi (section dividers), Danny Hayward (page headers 425–440), Sean Bonney (page 23) and Sacha Kahir (End Notes)

Arguments

140 History, System and Subsumption
Andrés Saenz De Sicilia

174 Real Subsumption and the Contradiction between the Proletariat and Capital: An Historical Approach
Théorie Communiste

215 Wandering Abstraction
Ray Brassier

241 Differentiated Spatialities of Subsumption and The Social Factory as Phantom Thesis
Neil Gray

273 Feeding the Infant
Rob Lucas (Endnotes)

299 Spain and Communisation Theory: Past and Present
Federico Corriente

325 The Fantasy of Subsumption? Labour-Power and the Social (non) Relation
Nadia Bou Ali

The Susurrant Revolution I: On Eclipsing Technocapitalism's Architecture of Subsumption
Jessika Khazrik

364 This Implies Nothing
Anthony Iles

407 Stirner, Marx and the Unreal Totality
Andrei Chitu

425 Procedures of Abolition and Several Paradoxes They Throw Up
Marina Vishmidt

441 Dissociative Unity
Mattin

Dialogues

464 Keepsakes: A Response to Ray Brassier
Dimitra Kotouza

484 Abolition and *Aufhebung*: Reply to Dimitra Kotouza
Ray Brassier

504 False Totalities Don't Have Exits: Introduction to Error
Endnotes

Appendix

522 Acknowledgements

523 Contributors

529 Timeline of Subsumption

562 Bibliography

572 Index

Five years ago I stood
at a precipice, I looked over
the precipice, I stared over
myself, myself, myself, an empty
tin can overflowing so
overflowing with love because I
was groundless and gravity
was upside down

<>

Seven took turns doing it.
Salty, sweaty, a unity
of tadpoles, tadpoles. Polar opposition:
polaroid submissions: Shake, shake. Forgive me.
There is no place to go but
the hut where the ceiling is made
of straw, straw. They say a drowning person
will grasp at straws. They did not say
that person will have no strength
to grasp, will have no strength
to stare, and yet that they
stare.

<>

Introduction

Introduction

Abolishing Capitalist Totality: What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?

Anthony Iles
and Mattin

17

Wherever we are we find ourselves choking, trapped in a world we feel we don't belong to, that is built against us. A world that is going down the drain. Unable to stop it, as if its history has surpassed us, we seem to have missed our opportunity to do something about it.

Following the 2008 financial crisis and the social unrest and struggles unleashed in its wake all over the world, through each twist and turn of these crises an unstable continuum has persistently emerged; the rich have been getting richer and the poor poorer. In this period we have borne witness to increasing nationalism and the resurgence of new forms of fascism, local and regional wars, the return of religious movements as diverse as ISIS, Pentecostal Evangelism and spiritualist revivals, conspiracy theories such as Q-Anon and those of various anti-vax movements in the context of COVID-19, and the rise and fall of popular left or social democratic movements. Yet a credible internationalist political horizon to confront the full complexity of this situation is yet to emerge.

The idea, first formulated by Fredric Jameson and popularised through Mark Fisher's 'capitalist realism' maxim, that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism' has for a generation summed up the limits of the radical imagination.[1] We are then, seemingly at the end of the world rather than the end of capitalism. Rather than allow any radical alternative, or any progressive movement to gain ground, instead capitalism rolls on endlessly, bringing the world down around us as it declines into local and global wars, fascism, misogyny, punitive border regimes and ecological catastrophe (in its latest guise as zoonotic overflow). At this point, we must ask ourselves: why are fatalistic and totalising narratives so prevalent in our times? What would it take to work against fear, to restore agency and critical comprehension over capitalism's runaway processes?

In its presentation under capitalist conditions ecological catastrophe looms as a destructive fantasy rather than as a political problem to be approached. Indeed, it is as if it is simply too

total, global, universal or abstract a problem for present humanity to confront. The stakes of ongoing environmental damage and deterioration carried out under late capitalism are produced in such a way that we cannot simply confront them as a sequence of difficult choices. Instead generalised fear proliferates, preventing any clear course of action from being taken. This solidifies pre-existing disconnections between the operative fear politics of vague, false totalisations and a concept of the political which itself refuses any grounding foundation. This sense of total containment, incorporation and coercion has been formulated as a form of capitalist subsumption.

Social media and artificial intelligence has certainly helped to give us a sense of overwhelming subsumption of life processes and activity by capital, but this is operative only if we understand it as a monolithic field. Instead if we examine specific processes, specific use, labour and consumer composition of one or other example of social media we will see there are capitalist and non-capitalist logics at work, there is both agency for and moments of resistance, as well as data collection on individuals, organisations and activists. If, as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes, 'capitalism appears to flatten the earth to its specifications'[2], then critical approaches to capitalism which stress the uniformity of its grasp of the world risk reproducing a world of no exit – a flattening view of capitalism as a system – and tend to avow wildly singular and hopeful accounts of a highly improbable subject's agency in its overcoming.

Afropessimist, decolonial, antinational, trans-positive feminist, and anti-ableist theoretical currents offer us critical operations seeking to undermine the social foundations of gender, race, class, sex and nation which provide means of exploring and overthrowing the separation, abjection and subordination of particular working subjects under capital. These operations provide insights and necessary routes to direct attention towards the concrete particulars which the bad universal of capital preys upon and organises. However, just as each of these particulars must resist

foundationalism, so the totality within which they are accounted for must be understood to be historical and therefore temporary.

If we think about the politics of police or prison abolition, these are understood as closed, self-reproducing systems; they are rightly perceived as non-reformable. Looked at through an abolitionist lens they need to be completely destroyed, their logic, their categories, their architecture. Similarly, patriarchy or nationalism may be understood as closed and total systems. Through a kind of convergence or analogy with a Marxian politics of the self-abolition of the proletariat, abolitionist tendencies within these theoretical currents have come to be increasingly articulated in relation to each other. However, this has produced a pluralisation of totalities with few coherent accounts of their mediation or interaction. If the police or prison are treated as systematic totalities requiring total negation, does their destruction imply also the destruction of capitalism? Or, do they represent micro-systems within, or independent of, the wider system?

Polemically, from an Afropessimist perspective, Frank B. Wilderson III has offered the formulation: '[w]e're trying to destroy the world,' to mark out a distinction between Marxian approaches to the abolition of specific categories which sustain capitalism, and a purportedly more thoroughgoing and fully negative project of the abolition of a humanity presently construed as anti-black.[3] Such levelling formulations have drawn criticism for ontologising black suffering, resulting in a flattening of the analysis of the conditions in which black suffering arose, is perpetuated or might be undone.[4]

As Afropessimism as a critical discourse began to emerge over the course of the making of this book, there were strong moments of convergence between its discourses and those of another current of innovative theory, communisation – specifically around concepts of self-abolition – and divergences – most clearly in the conceptual hierarchisation of which totality is dominant or prior: that of the capitalist exploitation of labour or the anti-blackness both foundational and parallel to capitalist

accumulation. A theoretical renewal of the concept of subsumption, with its attention to the form-determining aspects of the processes by which capital grasps hold of social forms, could be a tool to explore the mediations between systems of law, anti-black, anti-women, anti-trans, or anti-indigenous violence, systems of language, work, gender, social reproduction and capitalism more broadly.[5] The response of this book is not a call to order, or a return to rightly questionable 'universals', rather it is to reach into and probe the historical mediations which structure capital's very motor of incorporation and completion, its ability to subsume. This book attempts to identify what remains incomplete about capital's urge towards totality and completion, and therefore what remains unsubsumed and undetermined under the social relations of capitalism. These are perspectives informing the conjuncture of this book, which substantially complexify Marxian study and analysis at the millennium.

We know we urgently need to intervene in social reality but we also need to understand it. Social reality, however, is becoming increasingly sophisticated, accelerated, fragmentary and changeable. It is not just the future which is fragile, but the past. Even past images of totality or the absolute, apparently coherent past movements in history, or revolutionary breaks now appear pockmarked with fissures and doubt.[6] This can be understood as allegorised in the recent discovery (through x-ray) of a racist inscription underneath Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1913). Where this severe black monochrome painting has long stood in for an image of a self-contained totality, a vanguard 'absolute break' with the past, it now turns out to deliver only a false absolute and false project of freedom. Such artefacts not only bring the image of a false totality down to earth, but also knock holes in hollow images of progress; indicating their swerves through racialised and gendered separations which reveal those previous ideals as false, impossible or incomplete paths to a full liberation of humanity.[7] The stability and meaning of categories with which we seek to grasp social reality seem out of sync. Moreover, the

question of what theoretical tools, or which social positions, allow us to think adequately about this particular time in history is up for grabs. This calls, therefore, not only for a thorough reappraisal of past theory and practice, but also for a speculative approach to the examination of our present conditions.

Where could we find theoretical tools in this landscape of expanding ruins? Rather than striving for what would be a false immediacy in relation to hastily constructed images of the totality, we have instead carefully analysed and attempted to pull apart some of the simplifications circulating in our times. This book, perhaps counterintuitively, begins from what may seem an obscure concept or category: subsumption. This concept, on the one hand, has a pre-Marxian history which goes to the root of what it means to think critically in categories and to build and think in concepts. On the other hand the concept has a Marxian history which goes to the heart of many debates about what it is to think systematically about capital and to think historically about the dynamics of class struggle integral to capital as a contradictory system and specific social formation. Obviously those who want social change return to the question: what is to be done? Here in order to complicate and problematise Vladimir Lenin's reformulation of Nikolai Chernyshevsky's famous question,[8] we have brought it together with Marx's concept, to ask: what is to be done under real subsumption?

From the Philosophical Origins of Subsumption to Marx

The history of the concept of subsumption begins with Aristotle's functional conceptualisation of subsumption as the systematic categorisation of things under the concepts which stand in for them. This was intensively developed through Immanuel Kant's critical modernisation of subsumption as a tool of classification, which reflects on its own possibility to understand and distinguish between what is doing the subsuming (thought) and what is being subsumed (object), *producing* a new formal unity amongst a manifold of elements (Andrés Saenz De Sicilia). From there, Hegel's

systematic orientation of universal and particular challenged Kant's equivocation between thought and world, insisting on the historical movement and primacy of human thought. Therefore, reconstruction of the philosophical history of the concept of subsumption prior to Marx indicates a very rich and powerful set of developments which substantially challenge many ungrounded post-Marxist applications of it. Reconstructing Marx's use of the concept after reprising this prehistory, subsumption informs an understanding of how capital seizes hold of social forms (formal subsumption) and shapes them to its ends (real subsumption). This operation therefore informs what unifies capital as both a system of production and social reproduction. Subsumption can describe what is shaped by capital (real) and what is used as found (formal), and therefore how we might meaningfully distinguish between thought processes and social processes, between capital as a seemingly self-perfecting system and the contradictory realities and inequalities of capitalist society. Therefore, through its reconstruction, subsumption emerges as a critical concept which enables thought, thought which is incomplete without reference to social praxis. Thought is not foreclosed by the capital-labour relation; indeed it must answer to, and discover its unity with, social processes and their transformation in practice.

Formal and Real Subsumption

When capitalism takes hold of an existing mode of production and labour process, imposing the wage system upon it, this is understood by Marx as formal subsumption. By contrast, in real subsumption the whole system of production is developed for the extraction of surplus-value, often through the introduction of new science and technology, with a view to the intensification of the labour process towards efficiency and higher productivity. The significance of these two phases, stages, or modes of the organisation of productive processes in capitalism and how they interact remains open to interpretation in Marxist traditions. Their combination and interaction can be used to periodise capitalism, to

study details of the labour process, the wage system, or to explore the systemic integration by capital of human activity. In analysing advanced capitalism, real subsumption has been used to conceptualise and suggest a form of closure of the world. For example, as Jacques Camatte has asserted, under real subsumption capital develops an apparently absolute hold on society; and capital tends through this process to become constitutive of society itself.[9] If we accept this premise, the famous question posed by Lenin is even harder to answer today. What is capitalism, what is the world and what is the human if thought itself is potentially undergoing a process of subsumption, becoming completely conditioned by the arrangement of the world on capital's terms? Yet, from this perspective, one which this book questions, such wild totalisations also produce a closure to thought. They generate the trap of only presenting the agonistic prospect of false exits, fool's utopias. Depending on how we conceptualise and experience subsumption, we reach very different models of organisation, spontaneity, action, agency and strategy in trying to bring capital to an end.

Another way of understanding subsumption, to follow more strictly Marx's description (in the 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', the unfinished draft of a conclusion to *Capital, Volume 1*, or the bridging text between *Volume 1* and *Volume 2*) is to see subsumption as the integration of labour processes into the production process under capital. Even though in real subsumption scientific research and technological advancement are applied to the production process, attempts to use the term to describe the rationalisation of all aspects of social life can be put in question because, used loosely and applied outside the labour process, the category ceases to critically describe any specific dynamic relation between formal subsumption and real subsumption. Attempts to apply subsumption as a category of periodisation can therefore also be problematised because what are proposed as distinct 'phases' of capital's development in fact reappear and continue to co-exist historically.[10] Not only do forms of real and formal subsumption coexist, they are distributed

Every day I wake up everyday inside the wage system / inside all its houses, never paid rent on even one. / Sleep nowhere. Every morning inside my wages / I lie in wait for those who sleep, I sleep / on their chests and never speak /Take this as spectral evidence. Meaning, Fuck death. – Sean Bonney

unequally geographically. These 'phases' appear to take place sequentially in certain branches of industry – one can outline the shift from one 'stage' to another – but equally industries move geographically, resettle and reincorporate the 'earlier stage' in a new setting and integrate it vertically into a global system of production which includes highly developed technological production and apparently 'artisanal', 'primitive' or 'pre-capitalist' forms. Whilst efforts to periodise can be illuminating, the role of subsumption in these schemas is overdetermined and perhaps one-sided, emphasising the historical at the expense of the systematic insights which subsumption can inform.

Following Engels' account, Marx's 'way of viewing things' is 'not a doctrine but a method', providing 'criteria for further research and the method for this research'.[11] We find in Marx's conceptualisation of subsumption a key concept, which cannot be allocated exclusively either to the historical or logical approaches he applied himself in his study of capital, but rather must be positioned as mediating between them. This contingent and complex reading of subsumption did not emerge directly from reading *Capital, Volume 1*, rather it needed to be excavated by the work of numerous scholars revisiting the manuscripts Marx generated in the drafting of his opus. This work, commencing in the 1950s, spawned the circulation of new and heretical readings of Marx's work closely allied to dissident revolutionary movements challenging the institutional perspectives of the workers' movement and left parties from the 1950s to the 1960s.

Recovering Subsumption

In the post-war period new directions in Marxian research were established through the work of Roman Rosdolsky, which investigated the various drafts of *Capital* by consulting the primary documents (Marx's notebooks and letters) in the archives where they were held (the Soviet Union, Germany, New York and Amsterdam). First published in 1968 in Germany as *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marxschen 'Kapital'*, Rosdolsky's book offers a radical

reconstruction of the unfinished project of *Capital* that reveals the centrality of methodological questions for Marx.[12]

In parallel to Rosdolsky's work, an unstable and subterranean grouping of Italian and French communists aligned with Amadeo Bordiga and the International Communist Party (which many from this scene subsequently left in 1966) began to translate and interpret the 'Results…', the *Grundrisse* and the *Manuscripts of 1861–63* and *1863–5* in the early 1960s.[13] Roger Dangeville, working as a secretary for Maximilien Rubel (a historian and council communist then working on a Marx biography), began to translate the 'Results…' into French from a photocopy acquired from the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow in 1964. Using the same source, Jacques Camatte and Amadeo Bordiga began to prepare extensive commentaries and translations from the 'Results…'.[14] Copies of this source were also used to publish excerpts and commentary on the 'Results…' in the Bordigist newspaper, *Il programma comunista*.[15] It is decisively the work of Jacques Camatte, in the journals *Invariance* and *Le fil du temps,* through which the significance of the *Grundrisse* and the 'Results…' are pushed the furthest and gain their significance within the French and Italian ultra-lefts, and subsequently elsewhere.

The publication of Rosdolsky's extensive commentary on the *Grundrisse* and these other formative texts, was picked up almost immediately by communist theoreticians with either marginal or antagonistic relations to their national communist parties in Italy and France. One of the most influential references was Antonio Negri, already referring to subsumption in 1971 and later citing Rosdolsky in a text published in 1973 which foregrounds subsumption through the reading of the 'Results…' as a key explanatory concept for the class struggle in Italy.[16] Meanwhile in France from 1973, Henri Lefebvre argued that the 'Results…' and the *Grundrisse* hold the key to understanding capital as a process both 'linear and cyclical' through which 'the results of production are the "unceasingly renewed result" of the process of production

and that, for capital, reproduction is also "the reproduction of the relations [of production]"'.[17] A move, which became an increasingly common gesture in ultra-left publishing in France, Italy and eventually the UK, US and elsewhere, during the 70s and 80s, establishes a sequence of contentions with institutional Marxism, drawing on these texts – largely considered marginal within orthodox Marxism – to legitimise reengagement with Marx's theory of capital on an anti-state, anti-union and anti-work basis.

Two other developments are worthy of mention. The first involved close reexamination of the categories of formal and real subsumption in a widespread debate amongst socialists and communists in the 1970s and early 1980s on capitalism as a mode of production and agricultural development in India.[18] A second, which is made legible in this book through a new translation, took shape in Mexico under the guidance of Bolívar Echeverría, an Ecuadorian scholar who had studied in the 1960s with fellow travellers of the German extra-parliamentary left. The debate around subsumption in Mexico therefore carried insights from the approaches to the critique of society of the Frankfurt School for Social Research and the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* (new Marx reading) which developed from it, but the specificity of subsumption is read there through conditions in Mexico and Latin America in relation to nature, science and technological development.

Misleading Translations

Through the developments outlined above subsumption emerges as a key term, through the prism of which the affirmation of work, the state, and unions can be understood as integrative functions within the subsumptive logic of capital. However, some translation issues perhaps dramatised and amplified a simplified interpretation of what precisely Marx was designating through his use of the term subsumption, removing the crucial link to its philosophical origins. In Italian, as early as 1966, Bruno Maffi translated the German term *Subsumption* as *sottomissione* instead of the cognate *sussunzione*. According to Antonio Negri, Maffi claims this 'was a matter of

making the choice in favor of a term that does not have mere conceptual consistency.'[19] Instead, as Negri points out, *sottomissione* – submission – is both inexact and carries a great deal of ideological baggage, suggesting a dominating relation, rather than a conceptually integrative process. Arguably, this early error contributed to the approach of Roger Dangeville to the French translation of the 'Results…', where formal and real subsumption were rendered as *soumission formelle* (formal submission or subjugation), *domination formelle* (formal domination) and *soumission réelle* (real submission or subjugation), again in place of the French cognate *subsomption.*[20] This mistake was both reiterated and radicalised in the first strongly politicised publications, *Négation* and *Invariance,* to work through interpretations of Marx's newly available texts and circulate interpretations of them through the hands of communist militants. Indeed, this disconnected these political currents and their readership from the longer history of subsumption as a concept which would presumably otherwise have been available to readers of Kant, Aristotle, Hegel and so on. The new availability of Marx's texts enabled very specific and differing receptions, first in Italy and rapidly following these in France, amongst communist intellectuals organised in extra-parliamentary groups, publishing initiatives and other informal formations during a cycle of intense class struggle and political movements at the end of the 1960s. Therefore the long-lasting impact of the political events of May 1968 in France and the Hot Autumn of 1969–70 in Italy carried with it an international engagement with texts and political tendencies developed from Marx's recovered texts. However, since the French ultra-left was the initial source from which many others translated the term, generally in English as formal or real 'domination', this use stuck and persisted, even in English and other languages until the early 2000s.[21] Limiting subsumption to sheer domination suggests a strong but distorting reading disconnecting it from the linguistic and epistemological elements of the term and its conceptual logic. Such readings, already developed by elements of the Frankfurt School in exile in the 1940s and 50s, proffered a doom-laden

teleology in which post-war capitalism surged to completion, crushing working class movements in its wake, and they proliferated in the period of defeats following 1968. This prevented attention to the precise ways in which Marx appropriated and transformed the concept from its philosophical uses.

Reception of the Concept

This simplifying use of subsumption has gradually developed a wider reception informing debates about the origin of capitalism, the dynamics of the capital-labour relationship, and differing models of capitalist development. Likewise, they have informed debates about models of capital as a system or totality and about the place of the working class *within* or *in opposition* to it. The apparent ascription of temporal phases to the transition from formal to real subsumption have often been mapped onto national models of capitalist development as well as totalising global accounts which articulate capitalism as a world system.

Another reception of the concept of subsumption which might have led to certain totalisations comes from a Spinozist reading of capital. In France, Louis Althusser's concept of production was heavily influenced by a form of monist Spinozism which led to an ontologisation of production. This resulted in an expansive understanding of production, extending to the point where subjectivity and desires became part of the production process, and therefore, also part of real subsumption.[22] This Spinozist understanding of capital influenced several post-structuralist theories including Deleuze & Guattari's *abstract social machines*, Michel Foucault's *biopower* and Antonio Negri's *general intellect* as well as the discussions on immaterial labour at the beginning of this century. Some of these discussions generated a problematic distinction between material and immaterial labour based on a confusion between abstract and concrete labour. Labour is not material, it is a commodity and it becomes one when it is no longer connected to any physiological category. The incorporation of subjectivity and language as part of the understanding of the process of real

subsumption triggered discussions around the notion of micropolitics, which can be understood as a strange point of commonality between the critiques of programmatism and Prometheanism.[23]

In an Anglophone context the reception of subsumption as a concept was slow and fragmented. Whilst ultra-left groups in the UK were already looking to France and Italy in the 1980s and 1990s, the renewed interest in these scenes and the re-politicisation around the anti-globalisation movement seems to have been the key force amplifying the term subsumption in its Marxian inflection in the English language in the 1990s and 2000s. Networked communication and a cycle of global capitalist expansion and resistance to it proved to be fertile channels through which circulated many of the less-read political tendencies of the preceding cycle of struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000), which attempted a synthesis of the traditions of workerist and autonomist Marxism with diverse currents in French post-structuralism, presents an apotheosis and turning point in this wave of transmission. After *Empire*, closer attention fell on the loose and distorting use by Negri of subsumption and subsequently many political readers turned to pay closer attention to other more marginal currents in the French and Italian lefts.

This transmission history and the inattention to its initial use in Marx's work and the philosophical tradition it drew upon the philosophical tradition it drew upon has produced a gradual loosening of subsumption's specificity and made it available as a catchword to simply indicate an inchoate feeling of general alienation, malaise and entrapment. The fault seemed initially to be in the articulation of real subsumption as a unidirectional and irreversible dynamic in these radical interpretations of Marx's concept, something already implicitly contradicted by Marx's phrasing.[24]

At the same time, there has been a contrasting tendency, which has focused on the synchronic dimensions of capital, attempting to describe how its elements relate together systematically and logically. However, examined in isolation from

the historical contingencies and uneven development of global capitalist society, an overemphasis on the logical and functional aspects of formal and real subsumption can gloss over equally important problems. Within this approach, subsumption begins to be useful for describing the dynamics through which part and system interlock together. A further approach would involve a synthesis of the historical and logical approaches, as from this perspective subsumption begins to be useful for describing the dynamics through which part and system, event and history, interlock together. This synthetic approach was initially brought to our attention through the publication of 'The History of Subsumption', in *Endnotes*, No.2, April, 2010.[25] If it is this text from which the initial debates and exchanges which produced the momentum for this book began, our project has also necessarily understood its starting point as returning to the publishing history and reception of Marx's manuscripts and expanding its survey of dissemination of the concept beyond the focus on sources in France and Italy.

Diachronic and Synchronic Uses of Subsumption

This book encompasses differing approaches to and receptions of subsumption as a concept. To these can be ascribed two temporal and methodological approaches: diachronic or historical, on the one hand, and synchronic or logical on the other. Both approaches have faced profound questions and challenges stemming from Marxists and thinkers working from post-colonial and decolonial contexts. These raise problems ranging from the differing models of indentured and unwaged labour which might be integrated into capital within regional and non-western development contexts to the different distribution of capitalist temporalities in what from one perspective might be seen as 'peripheries' and from another 'regional centres' of capitalist development.[26] Both of these approaches to subsumption – diachronic and historical or synchronic and systematic – deliver a concept of totality, but their understandings are different and have contrasting consequences. By emphasising the historical development of capitalism, for Jacques

Camatte, Théorie Communiste or Antonio Negri, capitalist totality – as a kind of completion of capital's project – is attained in the western world in the 1960s and 1970s. The telos of capital leaves us hanging at the end of history where only a leap of faith can propel us into the future. Instead, for a more systematic approach to subsumption such as that proposed by Chris Arthur or Patrick Murray, for example, totality is to be conceived in relation to the functional logic of capital.

If in the first model the course of capitalism in the final years of the 20th and early years of the 21st century reached a saturated complete integration, the second model offers us the possibility of differentiation between systematic totality and historical totality. Facing the first model are numerous challenges to the seemingly linear and unidirectional development of capital and class as monolithic systems. Confronting the second logical, model there are problems with construing capital as a system when it is so thick with exceptions to its rule.

Different paths to capitalism suggest not only different paths out of it, differing antagonisms and agencies in varied social forms, but also problematise the very master category's coherence in the first place. Is capital a coherent or incoherent system? Is capital a completed totality or an incomplete totality? Will it be completed or will it be undone? Indeed, if, as Rob Lucas argues in his text, 'Feeding the Infant', 'the distinction between formal and real subsumption schematises, in the abstract, the *generic temporality* of the capitalist production process, not its *social history*', then there are important mediations which regulate between Marx's *logical* and *historical* uses of the concept, and these imply the need for a much richer understanding of the temporality or temporalities at stake in the formation and development of capital as a social relation. A logical understanding of Marx's categories (Chris Arthur, Jairus Banaji) has unsettled some prior certainties over the meaning of subsumption within Marxological contexts. This, combined with recent work on the *MEGA* and development of the intellectual history of the writing of *Capital* as a project, has informed and

deepened exploration of these issues.[27] These developments have therefore opened the path for new contributions to these debates, such as those that emerge from attention to the pre-Marxian history of the concept as explored by Andrés Saenz De Sicilia.

Recent Debates and the Origins of this Book

During the 1990s and 2000s an exchange took place between the communist groups Aufheben and Théorie Communiste (TC) around the concepts of alienation, exploitation and the role of the workers' movement. Certain individuals subsequently left Aufheben because they were closer to TC's position. This led to the formation of the journal *Endnotes*.[28] Endnotes' essay mentioned above, 'The History of Subsumption', responded to these earlier debates and launched a complex and slowly unfolding debate around the concept of subsumption.[29] At the point at which Endnotes attempted to critically reconstruct the term, the concept of subsumption, and especially *real* subsumption, had become commonplace in French, Italian and Anglophone discussions between Marxists of various traditions operating across different disciplines and institutional contexts, in ways which bridged between debates of the 1970s and the 1990s and 2000s, drawing them into close dialogue. Endnotes' text took as its starting point the radical conceptualisations of Jacques Camatte and Antonio Negri and the subsequent development of the term by TC within a radical periodisation of the class relation.

TC claimed that after the second phase of real subsumption at the end of the '70s the proletariat had been fully integrated into capital, bringing about the end of what they called programmatism: the 'old labour movement', promoting, through the worker's identity, programs, demands and a transitional approach to revolution. TC's schema – which was important for the development of the communisation current with which Endnotes were initially in close agreement – proposed that only at the onset of a second phase of real subsumption, with the definitive historic defeat of that movement at the end of the 1960s and beginning of

the 1970s, did the communist revolution become truly possible as communisation. Communisation is theorised as an immanent form of revolution without the need of a program and that produces communist measures as part of its process (the self-abolition of the proletariat, the abolition of value, property, money, the state, and other capitalist categories and mediations). While TC and Negri offered totalising readings of real subsumption, Endnotes and Rob Lucas' contributions, presented here, have brought a level of conceptual nuance that questions these totalising tendencies.

The genesis of this book drew momentum from the circulation of publications and texts of a distributed 'communisation current'; diverse responses to it; and face-to-face discussions at informal meetings taking place in London, Stockholm and Bilbao in 2014. One of the key landmarks orienting this project was the publication of the journal *Endnotes*, with its first issue circulating key texts that had structured debates in left communist circles in France around the term 'communisation'. The first issue containing translations of texts by Gilles Dauvé and TC appeared in 2008, squarely in the urgent discussions of the prospects for revolutionary politics after the financial crisis. In the following years vibrant discussions emerged between different groups.[30] In opposition to the anti-prefigurative character of communisation theory, a discussion on 'Prometheanism' began to emerge in the 2010s, elaborating positions that embrace rationality, technology, complexity and universalism as integral to an oppositional approach to the totality of abstract relations in capitalism.[31] Two manifestos that took this approach as starting points had many repercussions and helped to develop the so-called 'left accelerationism' current.[32] The Promethean approach implied not only the possibility of developing a strategy or a programme but, furthermore, belief in the radical transformation of reality through rational means and strategic organisation combined with use of technology. These manifestos should be understood as responses to the limits and shortcomings of the movement of the squares, the Arab Spring,

Indignados movements and Occupy with their shared emphasis on horizontalism and direct democracy.

Ray Brassier's text 'Wandering Abstraction', first presented at the Accelerationism symposium in Berlin in December 2013, attempted to bring the discussions around Prometheanism and communisation together by interrogating the role of technology and theory in the revolutionary process. Posing the question, 'what theory is fit to recognise the real movement abolishing the present state of things in conditions of real subsumption?', Brassier's text analysed the connections between left accelerationism and communisation currents by tracing their genesis and questioning their shortcomings.[33]

With the political urgency of protests confronting austerity in Spain through the so-called movement of the squares, which took place in several cities at once, as well as the new political landscape in the Basque Country – after the definitive ceasefire of ETA in 2011 and the consequent institutionalisation of the Basque radical left – Mattin and Loty Negarti began to organise a reading group between March and September 2014 which concluded with a workshop held at Bulegoa z/b in Bilbao in November. Compelling its participants was a sense of missed encounters with, and need for, a renewal of discussion of communist theory in the region.

With the presentations given at this seminar forming an initial group of texts for this book, as editors we began to explore associations thrown up at the seminar and to build out from this into a constellation which could incorporate historical material and untranslated texts from further flung contexts. Over its long genesis, workshopping the book through reading groups, live events, readings and performances has informed the way we have put the book together by considering the form/content relationship as a set of problems and conditions to be interrogated and antagonised.[34]

Poetic Interventions

We invited poets, writers and artists (Anne Boyer, Lisa Jeschke, Em Hedditch, Loss Choi, Danny Hayward, Jessika Khazrik, Sean

Bonney, and Sacha Kahir) to intervene in the conventions of the book as a way of disrupting the normative engagement with the format, but also to put into performative practice some of the ideas that emerge from this book and our engagement with the difficult concepts of totality, abolition and subsumption. The publishing conventions that are often perceived as marginal or functional such as the back cover, colophon, spine, endnotes or section dividers have been rendered here as sites for action and intervention. The poets and artists were invited to undermine what we take to be the totality of this book by intervening in an experimental way in a given context, breaking it, twisting it, disturbing it, showing the potential for intervention at the edges. Our hope in doing this is that the reader will be able to grasp not only the concepts contained in the book, but also its form, in a multifaceted and engaged way.

Structure

This book is therefore organised around elements which help us specify and critically confront our situation through an understanding of its past, present and future. A section of **Historical Material** revisits one of the key points of the recovery and dissemination of the concepts formal and real subsumption through a very early reading from the newly translated 'Results…' by French ultra-left group Négation. A central body of **Arguments** tracks the reappraisal of subsumption and totality as concepts in different contexts and traditions. A section entitled **Dialogues** groups exchanges which developed out of the publication of Brassier's text, 'Wandering Abstraction', and the seminar we held in Bilbao. Throughout the book a series of **Poetic Interventions** respond to and deform the form-determinations imposed on our material by the standard capitalist conventions of the book, without necessarily escaping them completely.

Subterranean History

In his introduction to **'The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work'** by Négation, translator Federico Corriente analyses the historical

and political context and the rich discussions which took place in France in the period 1968-73 and some of their repercussions. Corriente points out the relevance of Jacques Camatte in the aftermath of his break with Bordigism. Both Camatte and Négation attempted to indicate blind spots and dead ends in the political vision of the post-68 communist left by questioning the emancipatory potential of the working class under conditions of 'total domination'.

Négation, who drew a great deal of notoriety in the Anglophone world for their forceful critique of workers' self-management published in *Négation*, No.3, 'Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution' (1973) (translated, published and widely circulated by Black & Red in 1975), have received less attention for their earlier issues and pioneering of the term 'real domination' (referring to real subsumption) in the French scene. Here then for the first time we are able to present the translation of 'The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work' by Négation, originally published as 'Le Proletariat comme destructeur du travail', *Négation*, No.1, 1972. Whilst *Invariance* under Camatte's guidance published the first commentary in French on Marx's text, it is Négation who made an extensive use of the terms 'formal and real domination'. In Négation's first issue the group arrive at a developed and sustained account of the concept of real domination married with extensive analysis of contemporary developments and struggles in the wake of extreme disenchantment following the apparent revolutionary promise of May 1968 in France. Their critique helps us to understand the limitations of new currents of social democracy in the early 21st century and the increasingly common demand for a Universal Basic Income which are bound to fail, if we follow Négation's position, because any affirmation of the exchange relation would only perpetuate the constitutive relationship between labour and capital. This text is paradigmatic for its ambition and in its wide scope. For example this text combines Camatte's idea of the human community with the anticipation of what might be considered 'left accelerationist' tendencies by claiming that its liberation would come through full

automation. It also contains a critique of subcultures within the revolutionary process which can be seen as anticipating some of the limitations of the punk movement at the end of the 1970s and the political claims subsequently made by cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s.

Roland Simon was not directly a member of Négation, but met with former members of the group regularly in the early 1970s, and held discussions, with a view to forming a common journal. Though fruitless, this ultimately led to the genesis of Théorie Communiste in 1975, with the publication of the first issue of the eponymous journal in 1977. In his Afterword, **'Négation: from the Abolition of Labour to the Search for the Subject of the Revolution'**, Simon summarises Négation's position while pointing out problems in their approach – for example with regard to the specific use of alienation and the conception of the human community as a communist society (a position apparently derived from the work of Jacques Camatte and the journal *Invariance*), through which it is understood that capitalism is destructive of 'authentic work' by socialising it for profit. In contrast, according to Négation, communism by reclaiming its socialisation would reestablish what is 'humanly social'. This leads Négation to offer a teleological understanding of the self-abolition of the proletariat, which for them would be necessary in order to recover humanity. Simon points to the limits of Négation's anti-programmatism, because there is no transcendence beyond their critique of labour and this inevitably makes it impossible for them to 'positively construct the movement of the production of communism.' Subsequently, for Négation, revolution is no longer considered from the perspective of alienation but from the dynamic principle of labour. By 1972 Négation changed their position, leaving behind what Simon calls their 'theoretical humanism'.

Regressive Social Necessity

Bolívar Echeverría was an Ecuadorian philosopher and critical theorist working in Mexico. Whilst studying at the Free

University of Berlin he participated in the German student movement in the late 1960s, establishing connections with key figures Hans-Jurgen Krahl and Rudi Dutschke. Krahl, a student of Theodor Adorno at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main, was both a central figure in the student movement and in emerging efforts to recover and reconnect the Marxist tradition of the pre-war Weimar Republic – utterly distinct from the phony scientism of 'dialectical materialism' officially endorsed by the German Democratic Republic and other Stalinist regimes – to burning political questions of the day. There in Germany, Echeverría was exposed to the burgeoning attention of these younger Marxists to the 'lost' texts of Karl Marx recovered by Roman Rosdolsky, a current which would become known as the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* in Germany. This knowledge he took to Mexico where from 1970 he developed a seminar lasting six years oriented around intensive systematic readings of *Capital* drawing on Marx's manuscripts, e.g. the 'Results…'. Later, this was further enriched by Argentine scholar Enrique Dussel, in his commentary on the 'Unknown Marx' of the 1861–63 manuscripts, which was published in 1988. Echeverría's contribution to the book is drawn from an introduction to translations of several key fragments from Marx's writing on real subsumption published in Mexico in the journal *Cuadernos políticos* in 1983. The extremely short but sophisticated text draws out 'two possible theoretical uses of this concept, largely unexplored by Marxist authors', which are on the one hand revelatory about the nature (or naturalisation) of technology in the immediate production process, and secondly indicate the potential for new means of the 'articulation of distinct modes of production' by grasping the not only successive but 'also complementary' phases or forms characterised by formal and real subsumption. For Echeverría these insights have potential to illuminate conditions in Latin America – particularly the social conflicts responding to the ongoing imposition of what he terms the 'regressive social necessity' compelling capital to '[perfect] the exploitation of the labour force' instead of following

the development of science and its potential to serve human social needs – as well as the intense social conflicts he saw opening up in the interstices between the coexisting distinct modes of production and their contradictions.

An Intellectual History of Subsumption

Aside from translating and providing an introduction to the text of Bolívar Echeverría, Saenz De Sicilia's contribution to this book develops from his PhD thesis *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx* (2016). This is a work which goes further than any Marxist analysis to date in recovering the pre-Marxist origins of the concept of subsumption in German philosophy, to illuminate Marx's use and transformation of the category for his conceptualisation and presentation of capital.

Subsumption, as understood in the philosophical trajectory reconstructed by Saenz De Sicilia's text, **'History, System and Subsumption'**, enables thinking, but also critical thought (production of categories, universals, subject and agreement). In philosophy, 'subsumption is broadly understood as a concept of classification or categorisation. In its most abstract and general philosophical form, it designates *a relation of belonging to a class of things,* of *incorporation into a more general category* or *into a formal unity,* as particulars are related to a universal, or species to a genus.' Saenz De Sicilia's account does not simply draw Marx's theoretical achievements back into the empty halls of philosophical tradition, but rather, the close attention to Marx's innovations helps specify the dynamic steps from Kant's critical articulation of subsumption through Hegel's systematic and synchronic 'contradictory unity of universal and particular' to Marx's crucial step:

> to liberate the force of this synthesis by grounding form-determination not in the dynamics of cognition – processes of conceptual analysis and synthesis, judgement and syllogism – but rather in what he, following Feuerbach, emphatically referred to as the 'real life' of 'real

individuals', a notion of life grounded in human flesh and blood instead of rarefied ideas.

Subsumption in Marx's hands, according to Saenz De Sicilia, becomes descriptive of 'a process of form-determination grounded in the transformative and appropriative relationship between social individuals and their material environment.' Thereby, through this materialist account of subsumption, the concept is thoroughly transformed from its ideal or cognitive basis in German philosophy and resituated within a living praxis which takes human activity as its medium of existence.

The Frankfurt School, Subsumption and Totalities

The problems of 'false totalisation' in the work of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer are also pursued through Anthony Iles' essay, **'This Implies Nothing'**, initially presented in Bilbao, which develops a snapshot view of the shifting relation to Marx's critique of political economy of key figures within the Frankfurt School over the course of their publishing history and its reception. Focusing on the centrality of 'domination' to several key works, the text evaluates the tendency to both totalise and pay close attention to the preservation of particularity within systematic analyses. This critical account therefore indicates both the limits of certain approaches developed by the School, but also its importance to the rediscovery and revival of the political reinterpretation of Marx's value theory.

Andrei Chitu's text, **'Stirner, Marx and the Unreal Totality'** juxtaposes Max Stirner's attempt to free the 'I' from all determination with what at first seems to present an opposing position – Theodor Adorno's quasi-ontologising of the capitalist system of constraints. These are for Chitu two positions that each fall into producing ahistorical forms of totalisatation, which instead need to be thought dialectically. Marx's critique of Stirner in *The German Ideology* provides, for Chitu, some clues of how to do this. According to his reappraisal of Marx's critique of Stirner

and its application to aporias in Adorno's thought, the illusion of freedom and self-possession is an historically determined form of naivety, specific, according to Marx, to the educated bourgeoisie.

'Feeding the Infant' by Rob Lucas (Endnotes) offers a sophisticated interrogation of the notion of totality and more specifically of a totalising understanding of real subsumption. Lucas starts by pointing out that Althusser, as a way of countering empty or mystical totalities suggested that one should understand the 'determinate unitary structure' of a totality by differentiating between different 'levels' and 'relatively autonomous' moments of the 'complex structure'. This approach resembles Marx's critical methodology. However, Lucas poses the question of whether these different levels are actually coextensive. He asks provocatively of Althusser what the boundaries of this 'unitary structure' are – if it embraces the whole planet, what would be the theory of the planet?

The problem with totalising understandings of subsumption in French ultra-left groups and journals such as *Négation* and *Invariance* – and this can also be applied to post-*operaismo* and Antonio Negri's work – Lucas writes, is that they tend to conflate the capitalist mode of production (with its determinate mediations) with an indeterminate totality, society. Lucas reminds us that subsumption does not mean domination, in the sense of one dominating the other. Rather, in subsumption, the concrete is subsumed by the universal of its own kind, like a 'whale is both *this* whale, and *a whale'*. Lucas concludes:

> Whether merely formal or fully real, subsumption under capital by definition occurs only within individual production processes, for it is only there that anything is directly identified with, or included within, capital itself.

This leads him to problematise the conflation between temporality and history in certain understandings of primitive accumulation, but also of real subsumption. For example, Lucas criticises Théorie Communiste's periodisation because by marking the distinction

between real and formal subsumption they schematise abstractly the generic temporality of the capitalist production process. If, it turns out, we are not actually confronted with the ontological problem of how to exit some saturated capitalist totality defined by subsumption, this of course doesn't mean that we are simply free to leave this mode of production behind, for the state 'polices the exit' and maintains our dependence on capitalist production. Thus it may be that the problem of the nation-state is what really underlies some of the puzzling over inclusion or exit that gets theorised under the heading of subsumption under capital.[35] Lucas ends by equating the proletariat with the dependent infant of capital. By not allowing us to move and produce our own autonomy capitalism infantilises us, but this does not necessarily mean that this infant will not learn to feed itself.

Fantasy of Subsumption?

Nadia Bou Ali's text, **'Fantasy of Subsumption? Labour-Power and the Social (non) Relation'** approaches the debate over subsumption between Théorie Communiste and Endnotes through the recent work of Samo Tomšič on alienation which draws upon the work of Jacques Lacan as it encounters that of Marx. According to Bou Ali, 'Tomšič's recent proposition' thinks 'alienation as a two-fold process of mis-recognition in the social link', such that two forms of alienation are knitted together in commodity fetishism. We must bring our attention to the first, in order to fully understand the second. Bou Ali argues that present communist theory reproduces the mistake of posing communism as the overcoming of alienation, where in fact theory must embrace and accept the first process of alienation or run the risk of perpetuating and binding itself to 'a fantasy of human life without negativity'. In this complex, it is capital which rejects the first level of (constitutive) alienation in order to mobilise a second order of (constituted) alienation bound up in commodity fetishism. It is this second order of alienation which assists in producing and mobilising, through constant renewal, the fiction of the subject.

Subsumption Spatialised

Neil Gray's text, **'Differentiated Spatialities of Subsumption and the Social Factory as Phantom Thesis'** was developed some time after the initial seminar in Bilbao on the basis of a shared interest in debates around subsumption, the social factory and theories of capital in its relationship to space. The text indicates the centrality of Marx's theory of formal and real subsumption to Mario Tronti's concept of the social factory, but challenges the claims made around this concept within the *operaismo* and post-*operaismo* traditions by arguing instead that questions of urbanisation, transport and communications are yet to be made central to a study of capital and class during this period. Interestingly, Gray insists that even though the 'Results...' were not available in Italian until 1969, Tronti's concept depends upon an implicit and 'thematic conception of subsumption' derived from *Capital, Volume 1,* Parts Three and Four. Drawing on a theory of *differentiated subsumption* developed by Vincent Chanson, Alexis Cukier and Frédéric Monferrand, Gray indicates the limits of the social factory thesis but retains the utility of subsumption as a concept, more or less strictly tied to production, but indicating its relevance to the work of 'differentiation of the antagonistic forms that mediate the capital/labour contradiction'. This points to the ways in which hyperbolic projections of 'total subsumption' in fact gloss over essential mediations, often marked by antagonism and resistance, which invariably command our attention if we wish to understand and defeat capital as a totality. As well as critical engagement with the key thinkers Ranziero Panzieri, Sergio Bologna, Manfredo Tafuri, Antonio Negri, Tronti and others, two key areas Gray's analysis leads into are those of the circulation and reproduction of capital through the built environment and the central role this plays in shaping social reproduction.

Movements and Missed Encounters

Federico Corriente's article, **'Spain and Communisation Theory: Past and Present'**, originally presented in Bilbao, made

a timely intervention into the question of the engagement, or lack of engagement, with the theoretical innovations of so-called communisation theory in Spain. What results is a rich archeology of autonomist and libertarian threads of theory and group formation on the Spanish left and its (mostly) missed encounters with the French and Italian left during the period 1960–1980. Nonetheless conditions bring forth theoretical and practical developments. In the context of 15-M, or the 'movement of the squares', Corriente discusses the ways in which the population in Spain responded to dramatic austerity and restructuring, tending to neither affirm 'production', nor the 'worker', nor forms of autonomy or self-organisation, but rather taking their leave of these categories, in ways which arguably follow the course which arguments within ultra-left groups have also unfolded.

Paradoxes of Abolition

'Wandering Abstraction' by Ray Brassier developed from a presentation given at Accelerationism: A symposium on tendencies in capitalism, Berlin, December 2013. The text was commissioned for *Mute* magazine in February 2014. It connected debates happening in what then seemed to be opposing scenes of communisation theory and accelerationism. Over a subsequent exchange, in **'Keepsakes: A Response to Ray Brassier'** Dimitra Kotouza criticises 'the modernist ideal of a rational, high-tech communist future'. Kotouza insists instead on the critiquing of theory which 'pre-empts the multiplicity of desires and conflicts that are unleashed in a struggle'. Brassier's reply, **'Abolition and *Aufhebung*'**, concedes some ground but insists on problematising an immediatist image of *Aufhebung* as 'total abolition'. Instead he understands *Aufhebung* as the process whereby a positive immediacy goes through a process of sublation retaining its negativity and the difference between the immediate and its mediation. Through sublation it is possible to generate determinate negations rather than absolute abstract negations. The short text by

Endnotes, **'False Totalities Don't Have Exits: Introduction to Error'**, is based on a presentation given at the seminar in Bilbao, subsequently developed for the book *Bad Feelings* (2015) and ultimately *Endnotes* No.5 (2019), and represents something of a sideways reply to Brassier's initial critique of Endnotes' position and other critiques of Endnotes' project surfacing at this time. It seizes upon inflated conceptions of capital as totality, of capitalist subsumption as a completed process and the 'no way out but destroy' interpretations of theories of communisation in order to correct certain limited understandings but also explore the critical truths of some of these more phantasmal positions.

With the understanding of revolution as a process of abolishing capital's categories and their everyday mediations, communisation-oriented theory began to draw close to currents in feminist and black radical movements. Marina Vishmidt's text, **'Procedures of Abolition and Several Paradoxes They Throw Up'**, originally presented at the seminar in Bilbao, reappraises some of the thinking around abolition in these movements in ways which build on the specific imaginaries around negation within communist movements, and relates to Brassier's account of some of the contradictions in conceiving of revolutionary activity through the concept of communisation as a process. In doing so, Vishmidt intersects two previously distinct but momentarily converging discussions, that of the stakes of gender abolition in communisation and Marxist-feminist theory on the one hand and the stakes of 'destroying the world' from a position of 'nothingness' in Afropessimist theory on the other.[36] Mattin's text, **'Dissociative Unity'**, picks up the notion of self-abolition and the problematics of which kind of 'we' is implied within this concept. The text explores the tension between the concepts of real subsumption, real abstraction, reification and form-determination. Through an examination of the relationship between abstraction and totality in thought and in reality, the subject of self-abolition is problematised.

'Real Subsumption and the Contradiction between the Proletariat and Capital' by Théorie Communiste offers the most

comprehensive historical understanding of subsumption. The text begins by explaining how the concepts of real and formal subsumption work in relation to absolute and relative surplus-value and how their intricate connections have changed over time generating a specific form of periodisation. Here they follow and expand Jacques Camatte's thesis on real subsumption: the reproduction of capital becomes the reproduction of society. For TC in the second phase of real subsumption taking place in the 1970s and 1980s the proletariat becomes completely integrated into the cycle of capital. After the failures of '68 real subsumption becomes for TC a totality that conditions itself and proceeds from its own preconditions. However, for them the real subsumption of labour and thus of society under capital is always incomplete. Here are the lessons that they draw from '68:

> The essential critical content of May 1968 and of that entire period was to practically come up against the fact that revolution was neither a matter of management nor of the proletariat becoming a ruling class which generalises its situation, universalises work as a social relation and the economy as the objectivity of society as a relation between things.

What emerges marks a clear divergence between the positions of Endnotes/Rob Lucas and TC. If **'False Totalities'** proposes that the notion of an all-encompassing subsumption-based capitalist totality is not tenable, **'Feeding the Infant'** adds precision to this criticism by shifting from an emphasis on falsity to one on indeterminacy.

How Can We Answer Lenin´s Question Today?

As we began, by tempering Lenin's question, modifying it through the reformulations of our contemporaries, we then ask: *How is it to be done*, *how it might should be done* and *what is no longer to be done*? *How* presumes what and who already. *Might*

suggests a contingent uncertainty, but also responsiveness to shifting the ground of action and potentiality. We should remember that we draw momentum not only from affirmative projection into the better future, but from the immensity of past and present suffering. *No longer*, suggests letting go, letting past tactics and problematics fall away to reveal the new and emergent outlines of the problem.

Through a historical and conceptual analysis of the concept of real subsumption we have tried to specify what we understand by a capitalist totality, which is different from a totality which simply includes all the things in the world. The dynamics of capital are extremely complex and impossible to fully comprehend in thought, but similarly, these dynamics cannot possibly incorporate all our activities. Our inability to comprehend this tension has led in the past to many Marxists and post-Marxists producing problematic conceptual totalisations in order to provide an explanation for political impotence in the face of an overwhelming system. Through the book we have reconstructed *subsumption* as a concept, with both *historical* and *logical* dimensions whose interrelation is critically relevant to the understanding of capitalist reality today. We have reconstructed the concept of subsumption in its philosophical prehistory, and in its radical reconceptualisation as a tool of insight into the workings of capital as a system and a reality (a transformative understanding of mobile categories such as labour, class, work, movement and revolution in their lived and concrete actuality). Through reconnecting the developing meanings of subsumption as a mode of thinking in categories and of the incorporation of labour into capital, what begins to emerge is the dynamic and developing relationship between the intensification of categorisation and the commodification of labour and raw materials. Some examples of this can be drawn from the increasingly algorithmic organisation of all work, the transformation of experiences into metrics and predictable pathways, the customised filtering of information, and tendencies towards categorical thinking in post-internet

culture generally. Conceptual subsumption (to categorise in the Kantian sense of subsumption) is, in the technologised capitalist environment, preparation for commodification.

What is clear is that the intensification of labour in real subsumption, often assisted by recent leaps in computational power and its application, runs parallel to the increasing application of information in the labour process and outside of it through computational processes which tend to engender thinking in categories, as if our own abilities to think categorically have been appropriated and returned to us (which they have through machine learning processes such as search engines). There is then a tendency towards convergence between the patternation of our intellectual interactions with computerised information, our interactions with each other and how capital operates systematically as a whole. However, Marx's explication of subsumption here offers us cause for restraint, as not all tendencies towards convergence end in full convergence or indeed identity. Rather, as Marx shows us, subsumption represents a complete and continuous revolution – change is happening all the time – there is never a static picture, and to think lucidly we need to continue to both think in categories, and understand how they are made, imperfect and incomplete, and how they can be unmade i.e. dissolved and/or transformed in practice.

Fully understanding subsumption, clearly renders social democracy an impossible anticapitalist project because the relationship between capitalist totality and its constituting categories such as work, value and the nation state are part of the form-determining processes that occur in subsumption. To defend these categories is to use your enemy's tools. Rather than destroying capitalism, it keeps rendering the struggles sterile or even worse, and as we know from past experiences, they can help the counter-revolution. As a preliminary step to answer the question of what is to be done, we think it is necessary to understand the intricate relationship between the constituting categories of the capitalist mode of production and our perception and conception

of totality. As we have learnt from making this book, there is a crucial difference between what we mean by capitalist totality and totality in the general sense. Understanding this gap gives us a realistic hope against the pessimistic, bleak and totalising horizon so prevalent in these days. With rising inflation, precarisation and militarisation we can envisage a new wave of struggles coming up which might well be more radical than the previous ones. It is time to take into account that how we understand capitalism determines how we end capitalism.

1

Fredric Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review,* May/June, 2003, https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii21/articles/fredric-jameson-future-city

2

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins,* Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2015, p.61.

3

Frank B. Wilderson III, 'We're Trying to Destroy the World' – Anti-Blackness and Police Violence After Ferguson', https://illwill.com/print/were-trying-to-destroy-the-world. With regard to subsumption, Wilderson has argued elsewhere: 'Fundamental to Marxism is the notion that the world is unethical due to its subsumption by relations of capital. What we learn from Fanon and others is that the world is unethical due to its subsumption by the slave relation.' He continues, arguing against the determinacy of the capital-labour relation, where the antagonism between labour and capital to be 'solved', 'the world would still be subsumed by the slave relation.' Frank Wilderson III, 'Biko and the Problematic of Presence', in *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko,* Eds. Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel C. Gibson, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.104. There is little basis in the genealogy of the concept of subsumption we trace here, or in Marxism as we know it, for such an ethical reading. Wilderson's position has drawn strong criticism from black anti-imperialist Marxists recently (see footnote 4), but not on the basis of a close reading of the concept of subsumption. This is then yet another heterodox reading of subsumption characteristic of the wandering of the concept since its recovery in the 1960s.

4

See Annie Olaloku-Teriba, 'Afro-Pessimism and the (Un)Logic of Anti-Blackness', *Historical Materialism,* Vol.26, No.2, 2018, https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/afro-pessimism-and-unlogic-anti-blackness

5

Wilderson, along with other scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, David Marriot and Jared Sexton, have worked to excavate how general categories such as 'humanity', 'life' and 'health' are not

only inimical to the experience of black people but draw their coherence precisely from their policing and suppression by violent anti-blackness. This then, in a more philosophical vein, channels into the social categories which many, but not all, Marxists indeed treat as neutral, but are in fact heavily coded around the subordination of black bodies.

6

Lisa Adkins has argued that these contortions of time are specific to 'debt society' and the 'indebted subject': 'these logics bind the indebted subject to a time in which pasts, presents and futures do not stand in a pre-set relation to one another, but are open to constant revision.' Lisa Adkins, 'Speculative Futures in the Time of Debt', *The Sociological Review,* Vol.65, No.3, 2017, pp.448–462.

7

Hannah Black, 'Fractal Freedoms', Afterall, No.41, 2016.

8

Three recent reformulations of Chernyshevsky's phrase inform our approach: Tiqqun, *How Is It To Be Done?,* Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001, and Idris Robinson's recent talk and text, 'How it Might Should Be Done?', 2020, Original video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQeW7RPkCZQ&t=302s Transcript, Ill Will Editions, https://illwill.com/how-it-might-should-be-done, and Ray Brassier's recovery of modernist aesthetics in the context of noise and free improvisation, formulated as 'what is no longer to be done', Ray Brassier, 'Foreword' in Mattin, *Social Dissonance,* Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2022.

9

Jacques Camatte, 'The Wandering of Humanity', in *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays,* New York: Autonomedia, 1995, p.40.

10

E.g. see Perlman's account of 'ongoing primitive accumulation' in Fredy Perlman, 'The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism', Detroit: Black & Red, 1985, p.22.

11

Friedrich Engels, 'Letter from Engels To W. Sombart In Breslaun. London, March 11, 1895', https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/letters/95_03_11.htm

12

'[...] That this was Marx's method from the outset can be seen best of all in the numerous passages in the *Rough Draft [Grundrisse],* in the *Contribution* and in *Capital* which provide – parallel to the logical derivation of value and money – a historical derivation of these same concepts, in which Marx confronts the results of his abstract analysis with actual historical development.' Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital',* (Trans. Peter Burgess) London: Pluto, (1968) 1977, p.115.

13

An excellent English language introduction to the work of Jacques Camatte and this milieu has recently been published in Michele Garau, 'The Community of Capital: On Jacques Camatte', 24 April, 2022, https://illwill.com/the-community-of-capital

14

1964-66 *Le Sixieme chapitre inédit du Capital et l'œuvre économique de Marx* prepared by Jacques Camatte with Amadeo Bordiga. This eventually appeared in French with *Capital and Community in Invariance* No.2, April-June, 1968, available: https://archive.leftove.rs/document/KDB/7. This was also to have been the title to the Italian translation of the following texts: *The Unpublished Sixth Chapter of 'Capital' and the Economic Work of Marx* (1964-6), with the additional notes of 1972; *Theses on Capitalism* (T); *A Propos Capital* (1971); *About the Revolution* (1972). The publishers, Dedalo, thought otherwise, and they appeared instead under the title *il capitale totale* (1976). Published in English as Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community: the Results of The Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx,* (Trans. David Brown), London: Unpopular Books, 1988. This publication history is explored in further detail throughout the book and particularly in the Timeline of Subsumption in the appendices to this book.

15

A resumé of the 'Results…' was published by Bruno Maffi in *Il programma comunista*, nos.5–6, March 1966, available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/LNQ/

16

Antonio Negri, 'Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization' (1971) and 'Workers' Party Against Work' (1973) in *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy,* (Trans. Arianna Bove, Ed Emery, Francesca Novello, and Timothy Murphy), New York, NY: Verso, 2005.

17

Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism,* (Trans. Frank Bryant), New York: Allison & Busby; St Martins Press, (1973) 1976, p.9 and p.46.

18

For example, Dipanker Gupta, 'Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital: The Instance of Share-Cropping', *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol.15, No.39 (September, 1980), pp.A98–A106.

19

Antonio Negri, 'Workers' Party Against Work' (1973), *Books for Burning,* op. cit., p.116, n9.

20

Despite proximity in related Bordigist milieus, Jacques Camatte was equally critical of Dangeville's translation and interpretation at the time and made qualifications of his own by strongly interpreting the term. Even if, for us, Camatte took on and radically but rather one-dimensionally developed these new insights, they are worth reproducing here:, 'we note that we, like others, translate *Unterordnung* as subordination and *Subsumtion* as subsumption. *Subsumtion* means rather more than just submission. *Subsumieren* really means "to include in something", "to subordinate", "to implicate", so it seems that Marx wanted to indicate that capital makes its own substance out of labour, that capital incorporates labour inside itself and makes it into capital.' *Capital and Community,* op. cit., p.72.

21

The term is correctly rendered as subsumption in the English edition of the 'Results…' published as an appendix in the standard Penguin edition of *Capital, Vol.1,* from 1976 onwards.

22

Ray Brassier, 'Capital: Form or Flow?' 1/8, 10 Jan, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4l5fiI2QI4c

23

For a discussion of how subjectivity becomes part of real subsumption see Jason Read: 'In formal subsumption the production of subjectivity is linked primarily to reproduction, while in real subsumption the production of subjectivity itself becomes productive for capital.' Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, p.136.

24

'With the real subsumption of labour under capital *a complete (and constantly repeated)* revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists.' Karl Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' in *Capital, Vol.1*, (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London & New York: Penguin, 1990, pp.949–1084.

25

An earlier version of this text was initially developed in Rob Lucas and Nick Gray (Endnotes), 'Capital, Subsumption and the History of the Class Relation' in Tom Bunyard (Ed.), *The Devil's Party,* London: Centre for Cultural Studies, 2009, pp.30–42.

26

For examples see Neferti X. M. Tadiar, 'Life-Times in Fate Playing', *South Atlantic Quarterly,* (2012) Vol.111 No.4, pp.783–802; Jairus Banajii, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation,* Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2010 and Joyce C.H.Liu and Viren Murthy (Eds.), *East-Asian Marxisms and Their Trajectories,* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017.

27

Michael Heinrich, '"Capital" after MEGA: Discontinuities, Interruptions,

and New Beginnings', *Crisis & Critique,* Vol.3, No.3, 2016.

28

For following these debates between Théorie Communiste, Aufheben, and Chris Arthur see: https://libcom.org/library/beyond-ultra-left-aufheben-11; https://libcom.org/library/aufheben/aufheben-13-2005/theorie-communiste-responds and https://libcom.org/library/on-theorie-communiste

29

Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes,* No.2 (April, 2010) pp.130–152, http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/6

30

Groups such as Endnotes, TC, Riff Raff, SIC, TPTG, Friends of the Classless Society, Blaumachen, Kosmoprolet, Angry Workers of the World, and Wildcat have promoted the discussions around revolutionary politics in the last decade through publications and summer camp meetings.

31

See for example Alberto Toscano, 'The Prejudice Against Prometheus', 2011, https://stirto-action.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/the-prejudice-against-prometheus/ and Ray Brassier, 'Prometheanism and its Critics', published in the *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader,* Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014.

32

#Accelerate Manifesto: For an Accelerationist Politics by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek published in 2013 and *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* by Laboria Cuboniks published in 2015.

33

This text triggered further discussion and *Mute* published three texts related to this event, including interventions by Josephine Berry and Dimitra Kotouza in 2014. See Josephine Berry, 'Epistemic Panic and the Problem of Life', 13 February 2014, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/epistemic-panic-and-problem-life

34

The activity of working on the book was facilitated by panels staged at Historical Materialism in London in November 2018 where we presented elements of the book for discussion, and a week of workshops and events in Warsaw at The Museum of Modern Art in November 2018 involving Sean Bonney, Colin Hacklander, Farahnaz Hatam, Anthony Iles, Sacha Kahir, Mattin, Marina Vishmidt, Pawel Nowożycki, Edyta Jarząb, Sylwia "Ruda" Żołądkiewicz, Mikołaj Ratajczak, and Edyta Jarząb, where we held a performative reading group, in which we produced a score through collective notes and performed it at the end of the week.

35

The editors would like to thank Rob Lucas for bringing this point to their attention.

36

In terms of reconstructing these debates, Jules Joanne Gleeson's 'Abolitionism in the 21st Century: From Communization as the End of Sex, to Revolutionary Transfeminism', August 2017, https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/08/07/abolitionism-in-the-21st-century-from-communisation-as-the-end-of-sex-to-revolutionary-transfeminism/ provides an excellent summary and synthesis of debates over gender abolition in communisation. In terms of introductions to Afropessimist theory, Frank Wilderson III's interview 'We're Trying to Destroy the World',. https://illwill.com/print/were-trying-to-destroy-the-world and Ryan Lee, 'The Wanderings of the Slave: Black Life and Social Death', 5 June 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wanderings-slave-black-life-and-social-death each provide politicised entry points into Afropessimist theory oriented towards the new cycle (or simply new legibility) of struggles against police anti-blackness in the US catalysed by the riots in Ferguson in 2014.

I drink the water with
consistent pressure applied to the middle of
my stomach, feeling
the flow of water wetting the back
of my snot-clogged clenched throat, walking down
the staircase there. The staircase there!
The staircase there. The staircase there!
My water bottle is washed weekly.
I rinse it with warm water.
Soap will not remain. So,

<>

Some time ago, my love
left. Or did she? It is hard
to count.
Nobody who counts is a beggar.
Cold street on my feet. I am outside,
outside, the elements
will sing their song and deprive
me soon, soon, the cards
stacked far and wide and deep
against us, colossal sea,
time, time, tortured history,

<>

MadeRA

PERIODICO CLANDESTINO

Nº 4

/ PROLETARIOS DE TODOS LOS PAISES, UNIOS /

LIGA COMUNISTA 23 DE SEPTIEMBRE

I.- EDITORIAL:
LA TERCERA REUNION NACIONAL Y LAS "NUEVAS" APORTACIONES A LA "TEORIA DE LA VINCULACION PARTIDARIA".

II.- SINALOA: A LA CABEZA DEL MOVIMIENTO REVOLUCIONARIO EN MEXICO.

III.- ¡ ORGANICEMOS UN VERDADERO PERIODICO REVOLUCIONARIO !

IV.- ¿ POR DONDE EMPEZAR ?

V.- EL ORGANO CENTRAL.

VI.- AGITACION. (de "COMO FORJAR UN PARTIDO BOLCHEVIQUE").

VII.- SECCION DE OCTAVILLAS.

EDITORIAL: BRIGADA ROJA mayo de 1974

Historical Materials

Historical Materials

A Note on Bolívar Echeverría's Reading of Subsumption in Marx

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia

In 1983, when Bolívar Echeverría introduced Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption to the readers of the Mexican journal *Cuadernos Políticos*, the 'theory' of capitalist subsumption had already attained a certain traction, not only within theoretical and academic discourse but also amongst active militant milieus and revolutionary groups. An outline of formal and real subsumption found in the 'Results of the Immediate Production Process' (the so-called 'missing' chapter of *Capital*) had been available to Spanish readers since 1971.[1] Jacques Camatte in France as well as Antonio Negri in Italy had already been drawing on this text to theorise transformations of capitalist relations, developing historical periodisations of capitalism using formal and real subsumption as the markers of an epochal shift in the nature of capitalist power. In Latin America, revolutionary guerrilla groups such as Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre in Mexico brought formal and real subsumption into their political vocabulary, deploying the concepts in their communiqués to explain the shifting terrain of class conflict and clarify directions of struggle (e.g. in their critique of trade unions which, having been absorbed into the apparatuses of state repression, had undergone a historical inversion from revolutionary to counter-revolutionary institutions, or in their analysis of the developmental stage of particular sections of the economy).[2]

Why, then, did Echeverría select and translate a series of 'unpublished' fragments on formal and real subsumption, taken from Marx's 1861–3 manuscripts (an earlier 'draft' of the critique of political economy from that to which the 'Results' belong)? What intended intervention motivated the re-presentation of ideas that were already in circulation? A critical comparison of subsumption between these two 'drafts' remains to be written. Nonetheless, it is clear that Echeverría did not aim to establish a new scholarly interpretation which would situate the theory of subsumption appropriately within a 'complete' and static Marxist system. Echeverría had already emphasised the epistemological complementarity of the scientific and revolutionary aspects of

'critical' (that is, Marxist) discourse, which was, precisely, revolutionary because it was scientific and scientific because it was revolutionary.[3] Discourse is validated as 'critical' for Echeverría, not simply by virtue of the 'objective' accuracy of its description and organisation of facts (however systematic that organisation may be), but rather through the articulation and presentation of facts with a view to their historical trajectories, internal tensions, distorted forms of appearance and possibilities of transformation.

In his brief introductory comments to the fragments, Echeverría strives to indicate possible uses of the theory of subsumption beyond those which had been explored at the time and indeed, to a certain extent, even today. Uses which can sustain the actuality and operability of Marxist discourse in relation to radically transformed and transforming social conditions. Echeverría explicitly breaks with the established tendency of treating formal and real subsumption as mutually exclusive and successive historical categories, markers of distinct phases of capitalist development, thus also rejecting the stadial and evolutionist philosophy of history which this implied. At the same time, Echeverría's comments point to the significance of formal and real subsumption beyond being mere elaborations or illustrations of the concepts of absolute and relative surplus-value (a reductive reading common to much anglophone Marxology) and alludes to the 'global' significance of capitalist subsumption in its diverse modalities for the social reproduction process conceptualised in its material totality, a significance explored systematically in Echeverría's texts of the period.[4]

The possible uses sketched by Echeverría endow the theory of subsumption with a distinctive revolutionary inflection, both denaturalising the movement of historical-technical 'progress', insisting on its particular and contingent character, and opening the path to the conceptualisation of communist transition neither as a preordained teleological necessity nor an incomprehensible negativity. Essential to this alternative theorisation of revolution is Echeverría's designation of subsumption as the crucial theoretical

mediation causally linking capitalist relations of production to the development of specifically 'capitalist' technology. That is, the material inscription of a peculiar (capitalist) form of 'productive cooperation' amongst producers into the means of production themselves (and so too, as a consequence into products, producers, forms of social organisation and interaction, knowledge, language, etc.) which as a result reshapes and restricts social possibilities of action and contestation. An analysis of capitalist subsumption focused on this mediation has the potential to demystify the configuration of technology and sociality in the present whilst remaining indexed to 'the meaning and possibilities of a post-capitalist technological alternative' implicit in that same present.

1
Karl Marx, *El Capital Libro I Capitulo VI (inedito): Resultados del proceso inmediato de produccion*, (Trans. Pedro Scaron), Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1971. Following its initial limited publication in German and Russian in the 1930s, German, Italian, French and English translations of the 'Results' appeared between the mid 60s and mid 70s. See 'Timeline of Subsumption' in this volume.

2
Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, *LLamamento a la Clase Obrera: a los oberos del país*, October, 1974; Communiqué from 10 January, 1974.

3
Bolívar Echeverría, 'Discurso de la Revolución, Discurso crítico', *Cuadernos Políticos,* No.10, 1976, pp.44–53.

4
Bolívar Echeverría, 1984. 'La "forma natural" de la reproducción social'. *Cuadernos Políticos,* No.41, pp.33–46. 2014. English translation: 'Use-value: Ontology and Semiotics', (Trans. Andrés Saenz De Sicilia and Sandro Brito Rojas), *Radical Philosophy,* No.188, November/December 2014, pp.24–38, 1998. *La contradicción del valor y el valor del uso en El capital de Karl Marx,* Mexico City: Itaca; 2010. *Definición de la cultura.* Mexico City: Itaca, 2010.

Historical Materials

Subsumption and Regressive Social Necessity

Bolívar Echeverría

This introduction to translated excerpts from Marx's *1861–3 Manuscripts* was first published in *Cuadernos Políticos*, No.37, September, 1983, pp.2–3. Translated by Andrés Saenz De Sicilia.

Between 1857 and 1865 Marx drafted various manuscripts of his *Critique of Political Economy*. Of these, whose contents appear only partially drawn upon in the single volume of *Capital* published by Marx himself, the principal version is without doubt that from 1861–3. One of the distinctive features of this manuscript is the appearance within it of a well-defined outline of one of the concepts most central to the critical description of the capitalist mode of social reproduction, the concept of the *subsumption of the labour process to capital*. The extracts from this manuscript that we have selected and published in this issue contain some of Marx's main arguments around this concept.[1] We present them to the reader of *Cuadernos políticos*, not only as a demonstration of the radicality of the initial message, in Marx's case, of contemporary critical discourse – a radicality that guarantees its actuality – but because they can, perhaps, motivate a more adequate approach to many of the theoretical problems debated by the Latin American left today.

Two possible theoretical uses of this concept, largely unexplored by Marxist authors, come into view. The first is situated in the discussion around the essence of modern technology and the meaning and possibilities of a post-capitalist technological alternative. The theory of subsumption conceives of the apparently natural development of modern technology, together with that which would be, on one side, its essential effect – the 'perfection' of the productivity of labour – and, on the other, its 'incidental' effect – the destruction of the producer-subject as well as of nature – as a process that, far from proceeding from the *spontaneously progressive need* to apply the advances of science to production, is rather set loose by a *regressive social necessity*, that of perfecting the exploitation of the labour force. Modern technology is not a fact sent from heaven to impress its mark, malignant or benign, on the productive cooperation of the social subject; *on the contrary*, it is the result of the *imposition of a peculiar form of productive cooperation* – that which consists in the belonging together of

multiple labour-subjects to *one single capital* – upon the means of production, upon their technical potentialities and upon their capacity of reacting over and against the subject that employs them.

The second apparent possibility in the use of the concept of subsumption refers to the discussion in historiographic methodology around the so-called 'socio-economic formation' or 'articulation of distinct modes of production', above all with respect to the capitalist epoch. The theory of *subsumption* conceives the capitalist mode of being as one that necessarily has two basic versions or shapes *that are not always successive in time*, but *also complementary* in the same epoch: the *formal* and *real* modes of the subsumption of the process of production/consumption of society to the progress of capitalist accumulation. Thus, three basic, specifically capitalist, types of *contradictory articulation* between modes of production can be found combined at the base of the social conflicts of our epoch: the articulation of the capitalist form with a *pre-capitalist* technical reality, the articulation of the capitalist form with the technical reality put in place by itself, and the articulation of new, *post-capitalist* forms of sociality and technology with the socio-technical totality constructed by capitalism.

It should also be noted that the concept of *subsumption* has a special importance with respect to the core of Marx's critical discourse – that is to say, the theory of the contradiction between the socio-natural process of production/consumption and the socio-capitalist process of the valorisation of value. It is the most advanced attempt made by Marx to show in general theoretical terms the *way* in which those two contradictory processes are articulated. If already in the *Grundrisse* of 1857 he saw the labour process 'incorporated' as 'matter' into the capital 'form', in the 1861–3 manuscript he tried to see it, not as a reality *in-itself untouched* by a (capitalist) mode of operation external to it, but as a 'substance' affected essentially by the capitalist 'form' that, formally or really, it allowed to exist.

1

The majority of these can be found in the corresponding paragraphs of the *Results of the Immediate Production Process* (Chapter 6 of the 1865 manuscript); these also belong to 1861–3: they are an almost exact transcription of the corresponding part of the manuscript from these years. In *Capital* Marx also uses the distinction between real subsumption and formal subsumption; cf. for example, *Vol.1*, Chapter 14, where it is employed to ground the difference between relative and absolute surplus-value.

I C O

DIRECTEUR DE LA PUBLICATION : P. BLANCHET

informations correspondance ouvrières
mensuel le numéro 2 francs numéro 118 juin 1972

SOMMAIRE

contre interprétation	1
trois longues grèves	6
meeting MLF	13
maître auxiliaire	16
USA Blacks Panthers	19
Allemagne IG Metall	22
Canada grève du Québec	26
Au jour le jour	31
publications	34

contre interpretation du "contre planning" dans l'atelier i.c.o. n: 115 116

Ce texte a été débattu à une réunion du contenu d'I.C.O.: il a soulevé des discussions parfois passionnées; il a été convenu de le publier tel quel, et d'en donner les suites dans des numéros ultérieure. Pour l'auteur, il constitue la suite des débats amorcés par les articles sur les occupations d'usines, sur la grève du métro (I.C.O. N° 114 - février 1972).

Le texte en question me paraît des plus intéressants car il fournit un type d'information nouveau dans ICO: les luttes ouvrières qui ne sont généralement pas enregistrables par l'information officielle, qui ne sont ni des grèves-sauvages ou pas- ni des occupations d'usines, et qu'il faut avoir vécu pour pouvoir les signaler, ou tout au moins être en rapport direct avec ceux qui les ont vécues.

Il semble qu'aux Etats-Unis le genre de pratique tel que le sabotage organisé soit déjà relativement ancien, mais c'est seulement aujourd'hui qu'il apparaît dans des informations touchant l'Europe; car, d'une part, c'est une pratique de plus en plus quotidienne, généralisée, et organisée aux Etats Unis; d'autre part,c'est une pratique qui touche depuis quelques années l'Europe elle-même au niveau qui était celui des Etats-Unis il y a disons une dizaine d'années, à son apparition dans ce pays;et enfin les groupes "révolutionnaires" qui font circuler et qui analysent les informations d'entreprise sont pour la plupart, aux Etats-Unis comme en Europe, des groupes rescapés de l'ancienne "Ultra-Gauche" imprégnés de l'idéologie conseilliste qui tend à n'enregistrer que certains faits dans l'entreprise et en particulier les grèves sauvages et les occupations.

Ce qui produit un décalage assez important entre des manifestations autres et leur enregistrement par ces groupes: il faut que ces manifestations aient atteint un degré tel qu'elles ne peuvent plus être passées sous silence . Cependant, même lorsqu'elles font l'objet d'information et d'analyse, celle-ci les replace dans l'idéologie conseilliste autogestionnaire, comme on peut le constater dans le texte "Contre-planning dans l'atelier". C'est cette interprétation du camarade américain que je vais critiquer.

Je dois dire tout d'abord, qu'à mon avis, le fait qu'il ait vécu ces événements, et moi pas, ne donne pas plus de rectitude à son analyse qu'à la mienne: "avoir vécu des événements ne confère pas forcément une vision plus nette, plus précise, plus lucide des faits, et elle n'autorise en aucune façon à refuser un droit de critique à "celui qui n'a rien fait" ..." comme le dit très justement la réponse d'un camarade de Paris à un camarade espagnol au sujet de l'Espagne de 36, dans le même numéro d'I.C.O. D'autant plus lorsqu'une idéologie préexiste à cette analyse et tend à faire rentrer en elle tous les événements sociaux, ce qui est le cas des conseillistes comme des anarchistes (et des partistes bien entendu).

LE PROLETARIAT COMME DESTRUCTEUR DU TRAVAIL

NEGATION N°1

RESTER FIDÈLE à THOREZ :

UN SEUL DEVOIR: **PRODUIRE**

A DIT

Maurice THOREZ

aux mineurs

Produire, c'est aujourd'hui la forme la plus élevée du devoir de classe, du devoir de Français.
Produire, c'est faire échec aux plans de la réaction, c'est préserver et renforcer l'alliance de la classe ouvrière avec les classes moyennes et avec les paysans.

Produire, c'est assurer le salut du pays, c'est permettre la reconstruction économique, la renaissance morale et culturelle de la France.

Maurice THOREZ 22 juillet 1945

Les Démagogues flattent le Peuple !
Les Communistes l'appellent à l'effort !

En avant pour une République
fondée sur la Responsabilité Gouvernementale
devant les Elus de la Nation
POUR UNE FRANCE FORTE, LIBRE et HEUREUSE.

. C'est sur ça et contre ça
que nait le mouvement révolutionnaire.

3F

Publication Trimestrielle Année I Avril-Juin 1968

INVARIANCE

2

LE SIXIEME CHAPITRE INEDIT

DU "CAPITAL"

ET L'OEUVRE ECONOMIQUE

DE MARX

Marx
«Grundrisse»
2. Chapitre du Capital
10/18
Marx
«Grundrisse»
3. Chapitre du Capital
suite
10/18
Marx
Un chapitre inédit du
Capital
10/18

archinoir
3
Du mouvement des occuppations
a l'occuppation des mouvements
dans le mouvement
prèoccupant les mouvementés occupés
par le mouvement de l'histoire mouvante
et émouvante de
mon cul

INFORMATIONS Correspondance OUVRIERES LUTTES

le Numéro : 2 F - MENSUEL
N° 115-116 Mars-Avril 1972

SOMMAIRE

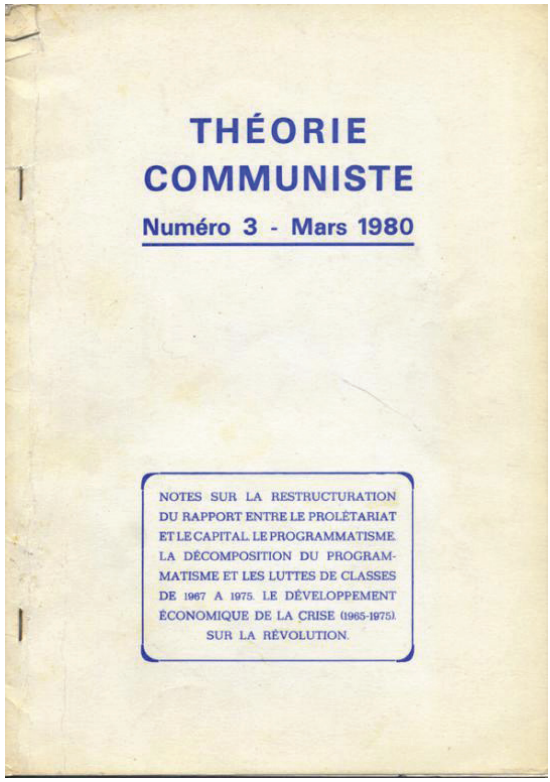
Etats-Unis	1
Grande-Bretagne	10
Autour des prisons	13
Vie des travailleurs	16
L'école des cadres	23
La crise de la Presse	26
La révolte espagnole	26
Cuba	37
Nouvelles de l'étranger	43
A propos d'I.C.O.	44
Notes de lecture	46
Publications	49

Directeur de la Publication : P. BLACHIER
Imprimerie Coop. l'Abeille - 34 Montpellier

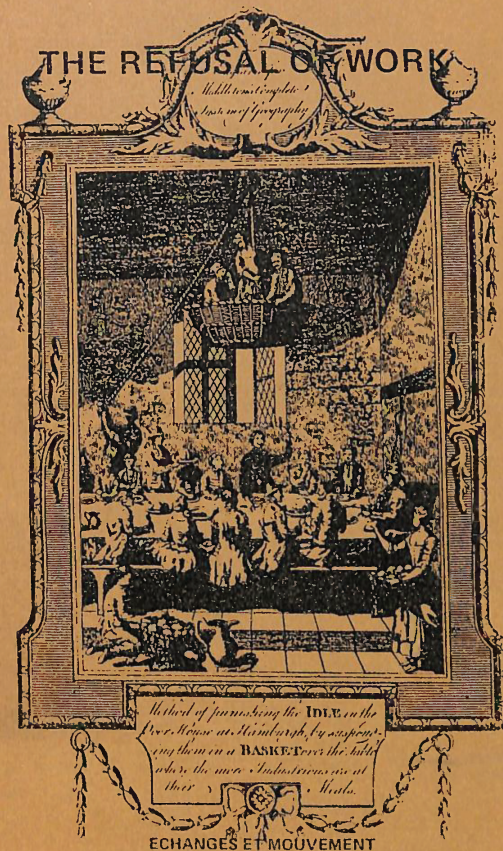
ETATS-UNIS

LE CONTRE-PLANNING DANS L'ATELIER

La classe ouvrière dans sa pratique au niveau de la production a appris, en résolvant elle-même ses propres problèmes, à dépasser les structures syndicales en leur substituant, d'une façon fragmentée, une nouvelle forme d'organisation. Il est difficile de déterminer quand, exactement a eu lieu ce tournant dans les luttes. Pendant l'année 1968 où j'ai travaillé dans une usine automobile près de Détroit, il m'est apparu clairement que c'était un processus de longue date. Tout d'abord je voudrais mettre l'accent sur un fait primordial : tandis que le sabotage et les autres formes d'activité autonome de la classe ouvrière sont déjà apparus dans le passé (fin du XIX[e] siècle et période Wobbly), ce qui se passe aujourd'hui est unique dans la mesure où c'est un phénomène qui vient après le syndicalisme de masse et où c'est une réponse directe à cette forme sociale dépassée. La construction par les ouvriers de nouvelles formes d'organisation est, aujourd'hui, le résultat de tentatives faites ici et là pour contrôler les différents aspects de la production. Ces formes vont bien au-delà du syndicalisme. Le processus de négociations y tient une place très secondaire, alors que le syndicalisme en fait une question centrale. Tout comme la C.I.O. fut créée par les ouvriers comme un moyen de lutte, cette forme est maintenant dépassée et détruite par nécessité, et une nouvelle forme organisationnelle se développe à sa place. Ce qui suit est par conséquent une discussion sur le rejet par les ouvriers des formes de luttes qu'ils avaient eux-mêmes créées jadis. Les activités et les nouveaux rapports qui sont décrits ne sont qu'un


THÉORIE
COMMUNISTE
Numéro 3 - Mars 1980
NOTES SUR LA RESTRUCTURATION DU RAPPORT ENTRE LE PROLÉTARIAT ET LE CAPITAL. LE PROGRAMMATISME. LA DÉCOMPOSITION DU PROGRAMMATISME ET LES LUTTES DE CLASSES DE 1967 A 1975. LE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE DE LA CRISE (1965-1975). SUR LA RÉVOLUTION.

THE REFUSAL OF WORK


THE REFUSAL OF WORK
Method of furnishing the IDLE in the Poor House at Hamburgh, by suspending them in a BASKET over the table where the more Industrious are at their Meals.

ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT

THE REFUSAL OF WORK

Historical Materials

Translator's Introduction to *Négation*, No.1: *The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work*

—

Federico Corriente

Federico Corriente analyses the historical and political context and the rich discussions taking place in France during the period 1968–73, as well as their repercussions. This introduction to Négation's early intervention into the French debate about subsumption points out the relevance of the work of Jacques Camatte in the aftermath of his break with Bordigism. Both Camatte and Négation drew attention to blind spots in the thought of the post-68 'communist left' by questioning the emancipatory potential of the working class under conditions of what they termed 'total domination'.

> The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.
> – Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

> […] the shock of May '68 caused a revival and a re-emergence of the currents of the workers movement which had up to then been held in great disdain by the established parties and consigned to oblivion: the council movement in all its variants, the old German Communist Workers Party (KAPD), the ideas of individuals like Lukács and Korsch, and so on. This resurrection of the past was a sign that people had not grasped directly the reality of the situation, and that the situation itself was unable to engender new forms of struggle and other theoretical approaches.
> – Jacques Camatte, 'Against Domestication' (1973)

In 1962 the Situationist International (SI) called for a re-examination of the classical workers' movement 'without any illusions, particularly without any illusions regarding its various political and pseudo-theoretical heirs, for all they have inherited is its failure'.[1] Thus, it might not be altogether too unreasonable to expect that, by now, at least a few thorough and disillusioned studies might have emerged from the ranks of contemporary SI stalwarts regarding the social upheavals of the 1968–1978 period in order to help the public to distinguish clearly between the dead and the living as pertains to that specific period of the (fairly) recent past. Among other goals, this hypothetical research project ought to have aimed at identifying the handful of extraordinary groups and individuals

who, back in the day, struck off all superstitions concerning the past and committed themselves to the task of critically reactivating and *transforming* the legacy of the heretical communist left of the 1917–1936 period, as opposed to those who chose instead to *recycle* that legacy in order to update their ideology and keep it within the most 'classical' parameters possible.

The French group Négation's text, 'The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work' (1972), is an exceptional document that clearly belongs to the former of those two categories. Hence, it not only manages to serenely separate itself from its past, but to this day remains an extraordinary settling of scores with all manner of current and future candidates to perpetuate it. However, the exception proves the rule, and it is a general rule of (pre)history that exceptions of this nature do not go unpunished, which explains the paradox that right after being published, such a visionary and vigorous text was to be buried under a thick and lasting cloak of silence.

As proof that neither Négation nor the more general theoretical contributions of the milieu it belonged to went entirely unnoticed back in the day, we might point out that another extraordinary text by this group, 'Lip and the Self-Managed Counterrevolution', was translated and published by Black & Red (Detroit) in 1975. This was preceded by Black & Red's edition of *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (Gilles Dauvé and François Martin) and of *The Wandering of Humanity* (Jacques Camatte) in 1974. The publication, a few years later, of two articles ('The Remaking of the American Working Class' [1981] and 'Communism is the Material Human Community: Amadeo Bordiga Today' [1991]) in which Loren Goldner pores over Négation's 1972 text and congratulates its authors, might be considered as further confirmation.[2]

Indeed, in his first article, after recounting that

> […] the very rich discussion among the ultra-left currents in France in the 1968–1973 period […] also resurrected value in order to insist, rightly, that communism was

> neither 'nationalized property' nor 'workers' control of production', but the positive supersession of commodity production and all its categories: value, wage labor, capital, the proletariat as a social relationship, all grasped as an integral whole. But this discussion, for all its richness (we are thinking of the texts of *Invariance* in the 1968–1972 period, of *Mouvement Communiste*, Négation, the *International Communist Current* in the same period) gradually dissipated itself in long dissertations on Value and the Self-Dissolution of the Proletariat without, except in a few cases, approaching the problematic of the total capital/expanded reproduction/credit or posing it.

Goldner ends the paragraph by referring to a footnote in which he explicitly mentions as 'an exception to this tendency the excellent pamphlet of the French group Négation entitled "Lip, or the Self-managed Counterrevolution"'.

In the second article – and we now get to the nitty-gritty of the compliments he bestows on the 'neo-Bordigists' – Goldner points out that 'all of the French currents put at center stage a text of Marx which, in the long run, may be more important than all the other new material that started to come to light in the 1950s and 1960s: the so-called "Unpublished Sixth Chapter" of Vol.I of *Capital*'. And again, just a few lines further on, he mentions Négation and emphasises that, according to this group, capitalism, in passing from the stage of formal to real domination 'de-substantiates the *worker* to leave only the *proletarian*'. (A distinction involving a multitude of consequences, among which 'The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work' mentions the huge increase in the ranks of the permanently unemployed in the US – most of them African Americans – as a consequence of generalised automation in industry.)

It is no secret that the author of this novel periodisation of both capitalism and the history of the workers' movement was Jacques Camatte. According to Goldner, 'for the first time,

in my experience, it became possible to connect 20th century working-class history not merely to bureaucracy but to the shifting nature of capital accumulation that produced and required bureaucracy'.[3] What could be more natural, therefore, than for Loren Goldner – given the ample and fruitful application he has made of this specific contribution of 'French Neo-Bordigism' in his extensive and varied body of work – to acknowledge such a debt?

That said, in (neo-orthodox) post-68 'left communist' circles not everyone has been as keen to openly acknowledge the contributions of Camatte and other 'neo-Bordigists' – a label, by the way, which Négation would have rejected outright – to the 'very rich discussion' regarding the period 1968–1973. Quite the opposite. What is more, on the rare occasions this milieu breaks its stone-cold silence on this matter, it prefers to juggle around secondary and subsequent motivations for its hostility rather than recalling those that truly hit home.[4] It is worth mentioning that Goldner himself has by no means embraced the more controversial theses that both Camatte and Négation derived from the new periodisation, nor has he ever ventured to refute the alleged 'mistakes' they would contain. Perhaps even more revealing is that his moderate defence of Camatte's 'early work'[5] seems utterly incapable of assuaging the outraged indignation of certain activists, who suspect – confusedly but quite rightly – that regardless of how 'early' that work may be, it still undermines essential postulates of the 'ruling revolutionary ideology' in depth.

Let us examine, then, without further ado, some of the corollaries – so unspeakably awkward and unacceptable to some quarters – contained within the new paradigm promoted by Camatte and Co.

The first one is that the main vector in the transition from the prevalence of absolute surplus-value extraction in capitalist accumulation (formal domination) to the prevalence of relative surplus-value extraction (real domination) was none other than the activity of the working class in defence of its own interests. In other words, despite what their protagonists may have believed

and the (deep) rosy hue with which revolutionary ideology usually depicts the classical workers' movement – including its most 'glorious' moments and those richest in 'lessons' – in the final analysis, this movement turned out to be an internal moment of capitalist development itself, a conclusion which sounds the death knell for the myth according to which the worker's movement supposedly 'betrayed' its true purpose for reasons somehow foreign to its own inherent dynamic.

The transition from one phase to another not only entailed a gigantic increase in the organic composition of capital and the consequent need for 'scientific management'; the resulting technological leap and the intensification of labour also required more sophisticated and internalised means of discipline, as well as the concomitant need to mass produce everything related to the reproduction of the labour force (consumer goods, household chores, healthcare, leisure activities). It was, therefore, a complete social overhaul that also required the progressive integration or elimination of pre-capitalist sectors.

This first corollary is the easiest one to accept and the most difficult one to refute for a fraction of the new 'communist left' born in the early and late 1970s (i.e. Loren Goldner or *Internationalist Perspective*). However, it is rejected outright, explicitly or not, by its largest and most militant sector, which senses that beyond the demystification of the historical role of the workers' movement only further catastrophes may lie in store. For example:

> What the concept of the transition from formal to real domination *lacks* is a compelling *political* vision, a clear perspective on the *necessity* of revolution, for communism *now*.[6]

Indeed, the next corollary, instead of constituting some form of new departure concerning capitalism's 'mortal crisis', heralds the mortal crisis of the workers' movement – both 'classical' and 'new' – which was just beginning to make itself felt back then.

The fully capitalist configuration of the labour process and the integration of the reproduction of the labour force make everything which, under formal domination, turned the condition of the working classes into something to be 'emancipated' from capital *disappear* (which does not mean – at least according to Négation's conception – that the antagonistic nature of capitalist social relations themselves disappears or becomes diluted, on the contrary). Therefore, and given that, under real domination the negation of the proletarian condition represents the only possible overcoming of capitalism, every notion of such an overcoming based on the assertion of a 'working class community' pitted against a 'parasitic' ruling class, and the subsequent seizure of the means of production by the producers is also thrown into crisis. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the widespread 'refusal of work' and the resulting forms of struggle were already hinting at the fact that it had become impossible to go on picturing the revolutionary process as a unilateral opposition between 'them' and 'us' (clues of which could be found both in the outcome of May 68 and of the Italian movement of 1977).[7]

The third and final corollary of the penetration of all spheres of existence by the law of value is the crisis of politics. Under formal domination, antagonisms between classes which represented rival modes of production – not to mention the existence of large numbers of small independent producers – transformed politics into a necessary form of mediating class conflict. For the working class, still in the infancy of its development, it was both possible and necessary to participate in this sphere in order to foster alliances and protect its own interests, and 'working class' politics and unionism eventually built a genuine and autonomous 'parallel society' within capitalist society.

Once the transition to real domination has been carried out, value in process, now capable of organising the existence of the 'material community' on its own, displaces politics as a source of social cohesion; the former survives, basically, as a superficial form of social integration and alternation in power at the same

time that the consumers of ideology recede before the ideologies of consumerism. During the 'transitional period', the workers' movement progressively loses its former autonomy as its organisations are integrated into the machinery of the state, while the weight of the political sphere continually declines in the face of the constant expansion of the spheres of mass sports, the film industry, scheduled leisure, 'popular' music, etc.

Since 1968 and the 'return of social revolution', the crisis of politics confronted the post-68 'communist left' with two intimately related problems which it cannot even pose correctly without beginning to renounce itself.

On the one hand, given that it still conceives communist revolution in the perspective of formal domination – as a process of political unification of the proletariat leading up to the seizure of power and the implementation of a programme[8] – it continues to believe in the need for a 'a programmatically-armed militant stratum' whose mission would be, if not to become a hegemonic political organisation just in time for its rendez-vous with 'revolution', at least to transform its 'consciousness' into the dominant revolutionary consciousness. This induces it to periodically fall prey to the illusion that social movements that do not manage to go beyond the sphere of politics (no matter how many 'radical' moments they may contain) are somehow destined to flow into communist revolution, resulting in astounding flops which 'revolutionary theory' cannot explain satisfactorily and from which it is unable to draw any other conclusion than 'we'll have to do better next time'.

On the other hand, under real domination any organisation that does not contribute directly or indirectly to the valorisation process soon finds itself confronting the dilemma of either adopting practices that will allow it to survive and thrive (if need be, by merging with the most successful firms in its field) or stagnating in irrelevance until it folds. Should a political crisis of the system require it, as we have seen in recent years, the demand for greater 'radicalism' is quickly catered to, either by the founding of new

organisations or the radicalisation of those already in existence (or both). Truly *superfluous* political and trade union groupings, however, can only perpetuate themselves as rackets, using the same general techniques of those who 'make it' but with more specifically sectarian features, such as mythical narratives and messianic programmes destined to bolster the ideological enthusiasm of the rank and file, foster competition with other groups within the same 'milieu', isolate their audience from noxious outside influences and establish scapegoats in order to unleash purges when needed.

In the specific case of the post-68 'communist left', however, its utter inability to seriously deal with these two 'blind spots' of its being without signing its own death warrant is merely the flipside of its refusal, back in the day, to embrace certain theses, which were explained with crystal-clear clarity, among others, by Jacques Camatte and the Négation group:

> We must say right away that when the proletariat expresses itself as a class, it constitutes, in its immediately destructive dimension, the positive refusal of the material community and of all its forms of organization. […] The crucial moment of this manifestation is […] the refusal […] to accept any split between decision and action, and hence, the split between being and thought upon which the possibility of a political direction based on the mechanism of direct democracy was built in the past (cf. soviets or councils) or, more generally, upon which the mechanism of democratic-despotic representation within the old art of organizing society from outside was founded: politics.
>
> Any formal party is no more than an organization quickly reabsorbed as a racket. The historical party can only be realised by the proletarian movement constituting itself as a class. […] All other conceptions of the party's foundation, such as that founded on the theory of consciousness coming

from outside, rest on the implicit negation of the proposition that the proletariat will realise theory.[9]

1

'The Bad Days Will End' *Internationale Situationniste*, No.7, April, 1962, (Trans. Ken Knabb), https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/7.baddays.htm

2

Loren Goldner, The Remaking of the American Working Class: The Restructuring of Global Capital and the Recomposition of Class Terrain', (1981), available: http://breaktheirhaughtypower.org/the-remaking-of-the-american-working-class-the-restructuring-of-global-capital-and-the-recomposition-of-class-terrain/ and 'Communism is the Material Human Community: Amadeo Bordiga Today', (1991), available: http://breaktheirhaughtypower.org/communism-is-the-material-human-community-amadeo-bordiga-today/

3

Loren Goldner, 'Left Communism and Trotskyism: A Round Table', 2007, available: http://bthp23.com/LeftCommTrot.pdf

4

Thus Camatte is usually berated, in not entirely unwarranted fashion, for renouncing the theory of value and his subsequent theoretical wandering, whereas Gilles Dauvé and other 'neo-Bordigists' (*sic*) are accused of a lukewarm attitude (if not outright collusion) vis-à-vis the Holocaust denial of former *Socialisme ou Barbarie* member and erstwhile *éminence grise* of *La Vielle Taupe* bookshop, Philippe Guillaume.

5

'Left Communism and Trotskyism: A Round Table', op. cit.

6

Mac Intosh, 'The Political Need for a Conception of Decadence', *Internationalist Perspective*, No.44, Fall/Winter, 2005.

7

Both the 'refusal of work' and the Camattian critique of 'organization' led to heated – but very scarcely publicised – debates on both sides of the Atlantic. Besides *Refus du travail, faits et discussions*, (published by *Échanges et Mouvement* in 1979 and in the UK under the title 'The Refusal of Work' available: https://libcom.org/library/echanges-movement-refusal-work), we should mention 'The Illusions of "Solidarity"', available: http://libcom.org/library/illusion-solidarity-david-brown, as well as 'On Organization: Two Reviews of the Camatte/Collu Pamphlet', available: https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/279-december-1976/on-organization/) and Various Authors, 'Camatte, Collu and On Organization', https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/280-february-1977/camatte-collu-on-organization/

8

The crisis of politics leads to a crisis of the 'communist programme' from the very moment the communisation of society can no longer be conceived of as the application of a 'programme' that would be in line with the historical needs of the proletariat, but which would require its ratification or approval as a result of the proletariat's simultaneously external character in regard to its being and its real activity.

9

Jacques Camatte, 'Transition', *Invariance,* Serie I No.8, 1969 (Trans. David Brown), available: https://www.riff-raff.se/en/furtherreading/transition.php

The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work

—

Négation

This is the first English translation of a text originally published as Négation, 'Le proletariat comme destructeur du travail', *Négation*, No.1, 1972. Taking up the entirety of the group's first journal issue, Négation's text initiated broad debates around the concept of subsumption within the French ultra-left and influenced key debates subsequently animating the so-called 'communisation current' developing out of this milieu. A summary and archive of the journal and group Négation (1972–1974) in French can be accessed at http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article44 Translated by Federico Corriente.

We thought it would be useful to define some of the terms used in this text beforehand, because they are very uncommon in customary economic analyses – although fortunately, increasingly less so. They have been drawn from Marx's lesser known economic works – lesser known because these works have been the most sidestepped, censored, or even slandered by the various official or academic Marxisms. In the main, these are the *Grundrisse* or *Foundations of the Critique…* also known as *Outlines of the Critique…* (1857) and the 6th Chapter of *Capital* ('Unpublished Chapter of *Capital'* in the 10-18 collection[1]), which Marx wrote in the years 1863–66.[2]

Labour Process: The production process of use-values.

Valorisation Process: The production process of surplus-value, and therefore of exchange-value. Within the capitalist production process they are inseparable. In the '6th Chapter', Marx gives this general definition: 'The production process is the *direct* unity of the labour process and the valorisation process, just as its direct result, the commodity, is the *direct* unity of use-value and exchange-value. But the labour process is only a means to the valorisation process, and the valorisation process as such is essentially the *production of surplus-value*, i.e. the *process of the objectification of unpaid labour*. The overall character of the production process is thereby specifically determined.' (p.145, 10/18 collection.)

Formal Domination of Capital Over Labour (or Formal Subjugation of Labour): Capital's first historical phase, in which the domination of the valorisation process over the labour process hasn't become real and total yet, and in which the capitalist mode of production still hasn't been implemented on a universal scale in any form whatsoever and allows pre-capitalist sectors of production (hand-crafts, agricultural: serfdom or even slavery) to subsist.

Real Domination of Capital… (or Real Subjugation of Labour…): Capital's second historical phase, in which this domination has become effective and real in several aspects (industrial as well as agricultural).

Material Community of Capital: A state of society in which the latter has been really and totally subordinated to capital and in which the products of this domination appear visibly, invading society as a whole and materialising themselves in different forms: commodities, money, the production processes itself, relations among men, etc.

Human Community: A state of society that has broken with capital by destroying it, otherwise generally known as communist society.

All these terms are, for that matter, defined in the content and the course of the text itself. Last but not least, the capitalist society which we speak of in each historical phase is that of the most advanced and therefore most industrialised countries, except when we are explicitly clarifying a specific historical situation: Russia 1917.

PART 1 – TOWARDS THE SUMMIT OF HUMAN PREHISTORY

I. Capitalism as a Specific Mode of Production

1) In order for the capitalist mode of production to come into existence, commodity exchange must be sufficiently developed and, consequently, domestic modes of commodity production must have become fetters to this development and thus have to give way to a superior mode: capitalist production.

2) *All production processes regulated by exchange-value involve a division of labour* (in order to become commodities exchanged according to their exchange-value, consumer goods must possess different use-values.) *All production processes regulated by value involve* (for better comprehension) their unfolding into a *labour process* (which produces use-value) and a *valorisation process* (which produces exchange-value). However, the capitalist production process tends to generalise and intensify the division of labour by grouping producers into ever larger productive units, and within this process, the valorisation process tends to increasingly and rapidly dominate the labour process.

To further its domination, capitalism introduces *into its productive sphere* the two essential factors of exchange: the *commodity* and *money*, which in domestic commodity production only affect the sphere of circulation. Labour-power is a commodity which, like any other, circulates on a specific market – the labour market – where it is exchanged for a wage that allows it to reproduce itself. This commodity creates value by expending itself within the production process and producing the surplus-value inseparable from surplus labour.

Therefore, capitalism poses labour time as the sole yardstick of social wealth.

3) It follows from the two main features of the capitalist mode of production defined so far – the intensification of the division of

labour and time as the sole yardstick of social wealth – that the foundation of wage labour is *individual labour* (or, to be more precise, what follows is the fact that under wage labour human beings possess an individual 'sociability', whereas in a communist mode of production – as we will see in Part 2 – they possess a social individuality) grouped into productive units, i.e. factories: when carrying out its function for capital, the proletariat is nothing but a sum of abstract individualities (commodities), the number of which and the time during which they will be employed is determined by capital.

4) In order for a commodity such as labour-power to exist, the producer must be totally dispossessed and must lack both means of subsistence (social reserves) and means of production. Three successive traits distinguish the proletarian condition:

a) *Negatively*, the proletariat comes into being dispossessed of means of production and subsistence, and possessing only its labour-power as a *potential commodity*.

b) It establishes its actual relation with the capitalist mode of production by selling its labour-power to this or that capitalist on the market, where *it is realised as a commodity* by circulating just like any other commodity.

c) *It acquires all its positivity for capital* by expending this labour-power within the production process, where it becomes a specific commodity that produces surplus-value.

d) Thus, under wage labour, *work is posited as a precondition to everything*. The lives of slaves and serfs were legally subordinated to their masters and lords, and therefore their labour was likewise subordinated to them, as a *legal obligation*. The proletariat reclaims its life, its freedom, and its equality *before the law*, only to immediately lose them *de facto* in the labour on which its existence totally depends.

As far as the proletariat is concerned, wage labour is the exertion of *a perpetual blackmail* that makes work a de facto obligation instead of a legal one.

II – Formal Domination of Capital Over Labour

1) At the outset of capitalism and throughout an entire first phase of its development, *its effects on the production process remain merely formal and potential*. Indeed, on the one hand, at this stage the capitalist mode of production has only infiltrated relatively limited areas of society.

On the other, during its initial appearance, capitalism subordinates the labour process to itself just as it existed under earlier modes of production, i.e., as a process of immediate and individual labour in which every worker executes the *totality* – or at least the greater part – of the productive process, *hence the name worker*, which originated in artisanal production, in which the worker produced – created – *a work.*[3] At any rate, the labour process continues to dominate the valorisation process, or, at the very least, hasn't been dominated by it yet. (In the examples given by Marx, necessary labour time is generally equal to surplus labour time: 6h and 6h). Thus, during the phase of capital's formal domination, there is a 'dichotomy' between *the specificity of the capitalist mode of production* – wage labour – and *the similarity between the capitalist production process* and its forerunners: in this phase, the labour process is, if not dominant, at least very important, and its foundation is the human being.

2) Consequently, in the production process the proletarian is endowed – equally, let us say – with the double character of a producer of use-value (worker) and a producer of exchange-value (proletarian). *Hence the 'dichotomy' within the proletariat itself*: as a potential (potentially dispossessed) commodity, *he is fully proletarian*.

– As a commodity that circulates and exchanges itself – as wage labour – *he is fully proletarian*.

– As a specific commodity operating within the production process, *he is both a proletarian and a worker*, and first of all a worker.

3) Therefore, just as in this phase capital's domination over labour and society is merely formal, so the proletarian condition is still only

formally dominant. Likewise, within the production process itself, just as production tends to be increasingly dominated by the valorisation process, so the worker tends to be increasingly dominated by the proletarian.

III – Social Representations of Capital and Labour

1) As we have seen, the dynamic of exchange-value materialised in commercial and financial capital gave rise to capitalist modes and relations of production. Along with these came into being, on the one hand, the proletarian, dispossessed of means of production and, on the other, the capitalist, the *legal owner* of these means.

Both originated within the dynamic of value, and the *true owner* of the means of production – on which they both depend – is the capital which the capitalist merely personifies as the manager of the production relations *legally promoted* to owner of those means. As we shall verify historically further on, once the traditional capitalist disappears, capital nevertheless continues to subsist through the creation of new legal owner-managers.

2) Under formal domination, the proletariat presents itself as the working class – the class of labour – because this class is still the foundation of the production of social wealth and of the labour process.

The proletariat is therefore the main bearer of the ideology of labour, and the Capital-Labour opposition acquires the form of an opposition between productive and unproductive members of society (‘Glory be to the former, shame to the latter!’, according to working class ideology.)

In this phase, the proletariat’s class consciousness is located and expressed at the level of its dispossession of the means of production, *where the proletariat is fully proletarian*. Within the production process, however, the consciousness of the producer of surplus-value is dominated by the consciousness of the producer of social wealth, and the most radical workers’ struggles tend towards the appropriation of the means of production and the self-management of productive relations. We may call this

consciousness *the immediate class consciousness of the proletariat, a producer's consciousness*.

3) It was at this time when the working class created the organs for the defence of its immediate interests – the price of its labour-power – namely, the trade unions. These representatives of labour-power also came into being as *representatives of the human labour process* against the scientific and mechanised labour process and the valorisation process. (The labour movement struggled against the mechanisation of the labour process which, in keeping with the logic of the system, meant unemployment and intensified separation between the producer and his product, and the destruction of machinery went hand in hand with the internal mechanisation that took place at the end of the 19th century.)

However, precisely because they defend the interests of labour-power, unions tend to make the valorisation process triumph. Indeed, sooner or later, fairly large wage increases force capital to mechanise, and to do so increasingly; the same applies to the shortening of the working day. Thus we pass from an extensive mode of exploitation to an intensive mode of exploitation, from absolute surplus-value to relative surplus-value.

It is, in fact, in the very nature of the workers' movement to tend to make the worker disappear from the production process, leaving behind, in essence, only the proletarian, and to bring about the real domination of capital.

In this context, and in the phase of formal domination, unions take on a 'revolutionary' dimension to the extent that they are the product of the proletariat's immediate consciousness, which tends towards the management of the means and relations of production: hence anarcho-syndicalism.

IV – The Proletariat as the Class of Consciousness and Ideology

1) All revolutionary classes up until the proletariat were the product of the development of value and, consequently, of the

productive forces which made the mode of production they managed *appear within the old system*. The development of this mode of production in turn rendered the *political domination* of these classes necessary, and as a result, they became revolutionary. *All past revolutions were essentially political* and this was the manner in which they generalised the domination of a social class. The proletariat, for its part, comes into being and generalises its existence within the very system by which it is dominated. This generalisation of the proletariat itself presupposes the prior and unprecedented development of productive forces and of value until the real and total domination of value over labour and society has been achieved. This development and this generalisation establish the foundations of the emancipation of the proletariat, *which is also the emancipation of humanity*.

However, and for this very reason, unlike the revolutionary classes of the past, the proletariat cannot establish proletarian or socialist sectors of production under capitalism – *for the socialist mode of production is that of socialised humanity, not of the proletariat*, which has *no political and economic future*. Its only historic and revolutionary role is to abolish itself to clear the way for this mode of social production in which humanity produces humanity. The proletariat is revolutionary in this sense, or it is nothing.

2) Having originated within the economic and social dynamic of value, the proletariat must master this dynamic by destroying value. *Thus, it is the only revolutionary class in history that must acquire the historical consciousness of its task* by taking up the cause of social revolution, i.e., of its own abolition.

3) Under formal domination, value allows political ideology to subsist, so as to complement its domination and safeguard it. The same applies to the proletariat, which remedies its feeble development and the dichotomy of its being by means of 'revolutionary' ideology, *a substitute for the proletariat's historical consciousness that lives off of* the latter, which remains merely potential.

Thus came into existence the so-called 'revolutionary' parties, first the Social-Democrats and then the 'communists', *which claimed to be the proletariat's historical consciousness* and took up the cause of 'communist revolution'.

Now the party form was originated by the bourgeoisie and its need for democratic organisation. The party is the organisational form of classes which have interests to defend *within the system and only within it*: bourgeois parties supported the (industrial, commercial, financial) bourgeoisie, and workers' parties declared themselves reformists and supported the immediate interests of the working class, at a time when the State had not really been taken over by the industrial bourgeoisie yet and in which the working class could intervene in the democratic debate between the different fractions of the bourgeoisie and the feudal residues in order to further its interests (e.g. when the Chartist party won the shortening of the working day in England, obviously in connection with the struggles of the time.)

The contradiction which plagued proletarian revolutionary or communist parties was to simultaneously take up both the cause of the proletariat and the revolution. Taking up the cause of the proletariat is obviously the opposite of taking up the cause of its abolition. In itself, this already constitutes clear-cut proof that *only* the proletariat – constituting itself as a class on the basis of its generalisation to humanity as a whole – can take up the cause of its own abolition.

Consequently, there is nothing *proletarian or revolutionary about the party form, which is indissolubly linked to bourgeois democracy*.

Thus under formal domination, so-called 'revolutionary' parties distil from the proletariat's historical consciousness *a content* which they then turn into an organisational form produced by democracy itself.

This clearly reveals the class future awaiting 'revolutionary' parties brought to power by social movements.

Indeed, the second characteristic of the party as the *political representation* of the proletariat is that its power stems from the social movements of the latter, which tends to generalise its existence by appropriating the means of production on the basis of its immediate consciousness.

Marx drew the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' from this immediate consciousness. Now, as we have seen, historically the proletariat cannot be a political dictator; rather, through its immediate struggles, it tends to generalise its existence and in this manner becomes a *socially* dominant class.

As a substitute for the proletariat's historical consciousness, the party thus tends to ideologically infuse these struggles, which it lives off of, with a historical and political meaning.

In keeping with its fundamental character and through these struggles – at a certain degree of their development – the party can actualise itself as a *historical substitute* and become the *true political dictator*.

In the absence of world revolution, in Russia the power of the soviets – the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat – could be nothing other than the power of the Bolshevik Party over the soviets, which, limited by their immediate consciousness – due to the feeble development of the proletariat – ushered in a new ruling class, the bureaucracy, the new manager of the means and relations of production, to whom fell the task of developing capital in that country.

What was at stake in the soviets – which did not appear in opposition to the trade unions but in their absence – was the generalisation (by way of the industrial development of the productive forces) of a very small proletariat; this was a long and difficult generalisation which the working class was unable to embark upon – given the potential force of the backlash, particularly from the peasantry, which despite being very poor was attached to its land – and which the Bolshevik party, after destroying the soviets as a class organisation, tended to carry out – poorly and contradictorily – given the new ruling class' inadequacy to the

development of capital under formal domination and that its power rested on both the small-holding peasantry and the proletariat.

On account of its essence and its nature, the bureaucracy carried out this gruelling development by means of a fierce dictatorship over the proletariat and by resorting constantly to the *lie* at the heart of its very existence as a substitute for both the immediate and the historical dimension of the proletarian consciousness!

V – The Transition

At the same time as the Russian revolution was taking place, important struggles were going on, both for that time and ours, in Western Europe, and in Germany in particular. This country, unlike Russia, was nearing the end of a transitional period in capital's domination, resulting from a massive development of the productive forces at the end of the 19th century. It was transitioning from the formal domination of capital over labour and society to real domination.

At that time, the unions, so to speak, were integrated into capital in advance of the actual integration of the labour process they were the representatives of. This was caused mainly by World War I and the need for German capital to secure social peace. The unions, as it were, deliberately got in line politically, on the side of capital, anticipating the absorption of the labour process by the valorisation process which, in fact, they deliberately and politically tended to bring about. The vacuum created by this integration led to the emergence of organs for the defence of workers' interests: the councils, which soon transformed their content into a potential for immediate revolution, i.e., the generalisation of the proletariat and the advent of the material community of capital (real domination). Thus, what was potentially at stake in the German councils was:

– The effective autonomy of the proletariat regarding its economic and political representation: and *the foundations of the reappropriation of its historical consciousness*.

– The unification of the proletarian being's dimension as a wage labourer with its position in the production process, where the proletarian was to completely liquidate the worker and establish a process of purely scientific and social labour (advent of the *complete proletarian* condition)

– In parallel with this, the generalisation of the total proletarian condition to humanity as a whole. This last point became visible in the rallying of the unemployed to the factory organisations.

Consequently, the real domination of value can be established through the conscious instigation of the proletariat, which thereby lays down the foundations of its own abolition, and therefore of the communist revolution: the uninterrupted movement of struggles of the proletariat, containing an uninterrupted development of its class consciousness, which may evolve from immediate to historical, can lead, over a fairly short period of time, to the rise of the human community.

This was not to be the case, however, for the movement came up against the absence of struggles and perspectives *beyond the factory* against the State, which was on standby, but which had not yet been destroyed. As a matter of fact, this situation was largely a result of the economy-politics separation which still subsisted – although barely – under German capitalism in the years 1918–20.

Consequently, political ideology and 'revolutionary' parties still possessed a real existence as representations of historical consciousness, hence the dramatic impossibility for the proletariat to reappropriate that consciousness.

On the other hand, the substantial development of the proletariat and the clear loss of sway of political ideology resulted in the 'revolutionary' parties being unable to fulfil their substitute role by taking power in the name of the proletariat.

Hence the final victory of the German bourgeoisie, which, despite not solving its economic problems, did largely defeat the

workers' movement, which was unable to carry out its specific task, the proletariat's immediate task contained in the workers' councils.

The confusion, the uncertainty, and the opacity of this period were embodied in a party like the KAPD, which wanted to be a party without really being one – 'an "avant-garde" that was to dissolve itself in the "mass" movement' – as well as in the various factory organisations (AAUD, AAUD-E), which were truly 'informal' parties. This was also reflected in the theoretical controversies and the attempts at theoretical articulation between the different components of the struggles (party-councils, class-party). All the theoreticians of that period – in Germany but also elsewhere, in Holland and Italy – attempted to understand the situation and broke their backs trying, which was quite a logical outcome in this epoch.

Instead of seeing in the councils the generalisation of the proletariat, the councilists – Pannekoek and Rühle, in particular – saw in them the realisation of communism.

The partyists – see in particular Bordiga and the Bordiga-based analysis in *Invariance* No.1 (new series) – saw in the councils a withdrawal of the class to the factory when no such withdrawal was possible, given that,

1) unlike the parties and organisations, the class had never manifested itself elsewhere; this is the classical substitution of the class by the party, but in this case, in a purely ideological form due to the impossibility of its practical realisation.

2) Quite on the contrary, the problem lay in the extension of struggles beyond the factories, which did not take place – with the exception of a few minor eruptions, such as the 'March 23rd Action', provoked, in fact, by the KAPD, which could already sense the defeat of the workers' movement and attempted to get around it by dint of revolutionary will. In this manner, the KAPD transmuted its desperate helplessness into a sort of 'last stand of honour.'

In the end, the material community of capital, the actual transition to real domination, was accomplished by Nazism. And it did so against the German workers' movement, sealing its defeat by way of its complete destruction and through the integration of the proletariat into capital by fixing it to the factory. This defeat was augmented and crowned by World War II, from which the German proletariat emerged split in two: the two Germanies illusorily opposed by ideology, a sad confirmation of its truth.

For its part, capital emerged doubly victorious, rejuvenated and exerting real and total domination over labour and society.

Nazism turned the proletariat into the 'socially dominant class' in a mystified way: by qualitatively and quantitatively accelerating the proletarianisation of the middle classes while simultaneously keeping them out of the productive sphere – within the sphere of circulation developed by capital to suit its needs – thus maintaining them as middle classes, proletarianised but not integrated into the industrial proletariat. The latter, for its part, saw its role in the labour process constantly dwindle in quantitative terms in relation to the overall productive process, while simultaneously becoming increasingly decisive due to the domination of the valorisation process, and therefore, becoming qualitatively more important. Henceforth the majority of men became wage labourers and a minority of them were to be producers of surplus-value.

PART 2 – TOWARDS THE END OF HUMAN PREHISTORY… OR THE END OF HUMANITY

I – The Specifically Capitalist Production Process

1) Once capital reaches the stage of real domination, the (human) labour process is absorbed by the valorisation process, in the sense that the production process becomes increasingly social and scientific, and (human) labour subsists essentially as the source of valorisation for capital, i.e., the source of surplus-value production. In other words, surplus-labour increasingly dominates necessary labour, and the latter is increasingly performed by the

machinery and technology that replace the human being, which essentially remains within the process only as a surplus-labourer.

The production process, therefore, becomes specifically capitalist when abstract and materialised labour come together to dominate concrete and human labour. Its perfection and its limit are attained by transforming the means of production into an automatic process.

2) This production process is fully *social* only because the valorisation process absorbs the labour process. Therefore, it is social only *for capital and through its mediation*. This is reflected in its organisation, by a division of labour that reaches a degree best exemplified by the semi-automatic assembly line. Workers subjected to increasingly accelerated work rates feel the effects of the humanly asocial character of such an organisation. Through this, it is the effects of capital they feel: abstract exchange-value producing labour *comes into existence and materialises for them, as it were, in the very organisation of labour*; this is one of the aspects of the *unification of the proletarian being*, whose full existence as a surplus-labourer within the production process now catches up with the full existence of his dispossession as a wage labourer.

3) The traditional capitalist tends to disappear. He now comes from the ranks of the organisers and administrators of the production process, such as managers and technocrats. On the other hand, as a result of automation, financial capital increasingly tends to appropriate the means of production by way of credit. Thus, setting out from financial (and commercial) capital, out of which it was born, the fully developed capitalist mode of production tends to return to it; only now it is the producer and finance capital is the product: *the loop has come full circle*.

4) For factory workers, the transformational consciousness regarding their situation can only be destructive and negative as far as the organisation of labour is concerned; and consequently,

it can only be destructive in relation to the production relations, because these relations *present themselves directly in the organisation of labour*.

This consciousness already becomes *immediately* apparent in the many *organised acts of sabotage* which affect the majority of Europe's most modern factories (FIAT, Turin, 1969), and especially in the USA, where these acts increasingly come to the fore as movements of struggle organised by workers which the unions cannot avow. Among other objectives, the saboteurs try to allocate themselves some free time to rest by totally disorganising the assembly line.[4] *This is a critique of surplus-labour*, which is an element of capitalist production relations, a critique of their existence as surplus-labourers, and *a desire to live*. These movements do not concern themselves with reorganising production *by way of or within* the existing production process; they have no managerial aspirations whatsoever, because the material foundations of workers' self-management disappeared along with the immediate producer. Moreover, given the point reached by the division of labour, the destruction of this division would require the destruction of labour, and the reappropriation of the means of production would require their transformation into a fully automated process. Humanity dominating the production process through its social activity of supervision and control: this is the transformation of the social character of labour for capital into its social character for humanity.

5) Unions have become integrated into capital along with the labour process. They defend the price of proletarians' labour-power increasingly less, and defend the interests of capital more and more, hence consensus policies and so-called 'progressive' contracts in order to avoid costly strikes; indeed, when machinery is the foundation of the production process, from this instant on, every interruption of the production process acts as a direct reduction of capital itself, of its initial value. The value of fixed capital is reproduced only in so far as it is used up in the production

process. Through disuse it loses its use-value without its value passing on to the product. Hence, the greater the scale on which fixed capital develops, in the sense in which we regard it here, the more does the *continuity of the production process* or the constant flow of reproduction become an externally compelling condition for the mode of production founded on capital.[5]

Organised sabotage and mass absenteeism have the same effect on the production process as strikes, *but they cannot be avoided by a good contractual policy*.

The integration of the unions led to many wildcat strikes during the post-war period (the first ones took place in Germany during the 1920s). Wildcat strikes constitute an immediate critique of unions *as alleged representatives of workers' interests*; but they do not, *and cannot represent*, the overcoming of unionism, as that would require no less than *a critique of the role of unions as true representatives of the interests of capital*, and would amount to their destruction: *the integration of the unions into capital can only be destroyed via the destruction of capital and its production relations*. One and the other (destructions) go hand in hand, but contrary to what many councilists believe or dream about, the destruction of the unions *cannot precede* the destruction of capital.

Unions increasingly reveal themselves for what they are in the eyes of the proletariat, but the latter does not abolish them for all that, *for it can only practically abolish them by practically abolishing itself*.

The interest of the unions 'naturally' tends towards the management of capitalist production relations, which some, such as the CFDT, have christened 'self-management'.[6] The more progressive managers, i.e., the most far-sighted ones when it comes to class struggles, support this claim by advocating co-management (cf. the dialogue between Petri, President of the Italian State holding company IRI, and Trentin, CGIL leader, published in the 14 December 1971 issue of *Le Monde*).

II – The Material Community of Capital

1) When value becomes autonomous and exerts total domination over labour and society, it gets rid of its old ideological presuppositions, such as politics, but it also gets rid of religion and philosophy… which it no longer needs to maintain its domination, since it *directly* organises the existence of all proletarian and proletarianised human beings; it is an ideology *itself,* materialised in the commodity (what the Situationists called the 'spectacle'). Value directly organises the proletariat's existence through its products, which are both the mass of commodities consumed by labour-power to produce itself as well as the capital-commodity (machinery) which consumes labour-power within the production process of that mass of commodities. Thus value produces and reproduces its own specific valorisation needs. The ideology of value tends to present the *products* of the development of the mode of production cum specifically capitalist – science, machinery, leisure – as the legacy of the 'society-of-all-classes-together', as if it already belonged to the human community, when it is merely the legacy of capital.

The State is nothing other than the regulator of the economy, that is, of the life of capital; consequently, *it is everywhere*, and tends to present itself *as the historical consciousness* of capitalism.

2) The truth and realisation of the ideology of productive labour is to be found in the ideology of the commodity product, the final ideological product of a system based on labour and production.

The blackmail exerted over the proletariat to work in order to satisfy its vital needs is perpetuated in the blackmail exerted over it in order to satisfy its alienated desires – the pseudo-needs of the accumulation of commodities, which are, in fact, the vital needs of capital.

In a nutshell, when labour and capital become one, the material community of capital presents itself before society as the human community: where one believes oneself to be dealing with

man, one encounters only value and its materialisation in the form of commodities.

Nevertheless, the human community lives and develops beneath the material community of capital; under alienated desires live desires, and the system produces its own subversion.

III – The Critique of Work and the Movement of the Product (On the Outside-of-Work Movement)

1) Once science has replaced man within the labour process, *the former tends to be increasingly excluded from the production process*, and consequently unemployment evolves from a temporary feature to a structural one, thus acquiring a more or less permanent character (particularly in the USA[7]); on the other hand, proletarians *tend to increasingly exclude themselves from this process* which, once the prevalence within it of the valorisation process has been established, *destroys the material basis of the ideology of work*. Young proletarians, born *when* the real domination of capital came into being or *under it*, articulate the critique of work by refusing work in various forms, which range from regular work absences to categorical rejection by resorting to expedients as a means of subsistence, hence the development of juvenile delinquency.

2) Proletarians thus marginalised from the production process rediscover their existence as potential commodities, which was once the foundation of the creation of wage labour. However, unlike the unemployed and the lumpenproletariat of the 19th century, *they do not constitute a backward 'sector' of capital*: back in the 19th century, the victims of the destruction of pre-capitalist sectors, the unemployed, as far as their capacity to expend themselves within the production process was concerned, constituted *the potential commodities of the future*: a future that belonged to the nascent capitalist mode of production, which was still awaiting its development.

Today, the unemployed are *the very product* of this development reaching its end in the industrialised nations. From now on they constitute *commodities with no future*, *no longer able or no longer willing* to expend themselves within the capitalist production process. They are, in a certain sense, *the extreme outposts of a system whose every possibility has been historically explored by them*, and as a result, they become even more potential commodities.

3) In immediate terms, given that they no longer circulate on the labour market, these commodities circulate *on the market common to all products*: the space-time of distribution-consumption, where they confront and consume each other just like all other commodities do: through rivalry, emulation, and elimination. On this basis, the years 1956-60 saw the advent of hierarchical groups of young proletarians – 'greasers', 'rockers', etc… – which fought each other, and whose members competed for leadership within each gang, given that every commodity and every commodity-community exists only *by difference* (the earliest gangs of this type appeared in 1930s Germany). This terrain of circulation and consumption is also the space where the ideological discourse of the value materialised in commodities is deployed. These communities of young proletarians live completely by this ideology, and by nothing else. In their midst, the refusal of work goes hand in hand with the glorification of commodities and *their own* self-glorification as commodities and products of the system (they flaunt *their own* attitudes, not those of the production process). They too exist as a community of capital, and their peculiarity is to do so *visibly*.

4) Nevertheless, when these communities of non-working and sporadically-working proletarians revolt against the capitalist order, they exhibit a destructive potential that calls the entire rationality of the system into question. Indeed, given the extreme position they occupy, these struggling communities *expose the entire system* and the very organisation of their existence as commodities.

Through looting they criticise an existence beyond which lies nothing but the human community freed from capital. Such were the black riots of 1965 in the United States, which showed a strong communist potential. In the wake of May '68, looting became insurrectional (mainly in Lyon), as well as in Paris' Latin Quarter – on a fine Saturday evening in June 1971 – as one of the first practical and massive manifestations of the European proletariat struggling on the sites of consumption. Two remarkable phenomena then took place: the immediate constitution of the leftists into a 'public militia' for the defence of 'the people's' capital and 'its' commodities, and the *real and semi-conscious* merging of these non-working communities with other sectors of the proletariat and the proletarianised middle class (students, immigrant workers, and 'adult and sensible' proletarians).

Therefore, by destroying the material foundations of labour and its ideology and creating communities of interests situated beyond work, and thus potentially beyond capital, the latter creates *its adversary* and the very foundations of its abolition: the product and its ideology *are nothing* when the possibility and the consciousness of productive labour have largely dissolved.

Due to their purely destructive character, these struggles, the potential negation of the capitalist order, are politically *unorganisable* from outside. For what we are dealing with here – contained in the refusal of work or the impossibility of gaining any access to it – *is the proletariat's historical consciousness*, born and developed from both the dissolution of the ideology of work and the dissolution of political ideology. Historical consciousness has emancipated itself from its ideological usurpation: the refusal of work goes hand in hand with the refusal of politics.

In these struggles, revolutionary consciousness presents itself in the immediate form of *a consciousness of the destruction of the product*, of *all* the products of the system. This consciousness cannot be realised within these struggles or on their terrain, that of outside-of-work space-time; it must make its way into the points of

production where the wretched production and reproduction of the commodity existence of these communities takes place.

5) Two important remarks are in order in this regard. The first one is that the more these communities of semi-working or non-working proletarians revolt against the system and confront it, the more they expose it, and therefore, the more they practically confront the organisation of their own existence and irreversibly transform themselves. In a text entitled 'Naissance du mouvement radical' ('Birth of the Radical Movement'), published in *ICO*, No.93 a comrade wrote the following:

> The latter (rock 'n' rollers) formed extremely hierarchical gangs with undisputed and tried and tested leaders, who had the right to strike 'their men', the exclusive right to fuck… with their favourites, etc…. Rivalry between gangs (bloody brawls) was the means of emulation and survival for each of them, and for the members of each one inside it. Few gangs now remain, at least in their previous form; they have been replaced by unorganised groups whose composition fluctuates according to the encounters of the day. More or less assertive leaders do exist, of course, but they are rarely undisputed. They fight other groups increasingly less, and more and more against power, which is beginning to show its true colours. The revolt of 'marginalized' youth has gone from the prehistoric age to the first years of its history, merging with the workers' movement – which indeed the 'outsiders' are part of – by exposing it.[8]

Apart from the misguided use of the term 'outsider', that is exactly what is going on.

The second remark concerns the comparison between the communities of commodities constituted by these gangs, and the leftist outfits, sects and various chapels of the student and intellectual far left. They share the same mode of existence – rivalry,

emulation, elimination, leadership, splits, etc. – and they too live exclusively by *differentiation*.[9] The reason for this is very simple: a great mass of students (and therefore of intellectuals) haven't begun to work yet, and perhaps never will; they are condemned to unemployment, not as the result of a crisis or a 'restructuring', but because, just as in the case of young workers, that is their lot; thus they are even more potential commodities. The proletarianisation of these middle class strata does not integrate them into the ranks of productive or unproductive workers, but into the ranks of non-workers, which relatively intensifies the degree of their proletarianisation. In becoming proletarians, *they immediately become so completely*. However, this is as far as the comparison and unification go: due to their social position, they breathe, bask in, and live on *political ideology*. While the young 'rock 'n' roller' lives *exclusively* by the ideology of value materialised in the commodity, *they still lag behind,* and live by the ideology of the organisation of value under formal domination, the ideology of ideology, *politics*, the space-time where they have always plied their trade. Consequently, their struggles take place on the same level as those of the non-working proletariat (struggles in outside-of-work space-time: streets, places of consumption, universities, etc.), but due to their 'political' nature, they tend to move in the opposite direction, i.e., to support *capital* and its process of reproduction of social relations by speaking *the language of organisation and consciousness* coming from the outside: 'politics'. Consequently, they end up clashing with the youth gangs as a result of their attempts to recuperate, organise, or channel them (cf. the looting of the Latin Quarter) by constituting themselves into *unions extraneous-to-production*.[10]

Their struggle against the unions, therefore, is a competition geared toward sharing power with them: the unions and parties get to keep control of production sites, and they control social reality beyond the sphere of work (critique of the institutions, demonstrations, universities, 'people's trials', pop festivals, etc.). However, this struggle is *illusory* and *increasingly ineffective*, because it is

the struggle of the last historically political consciousness, leftism, against capital and its historically social products.

It is the struggle of the middle classes to stop the onslaught of time at the very historical moment when social time is exterminating them. By affirming politics, they also affirm *work* and exalt proletarians as immediate workers, as well as their immediate consciousness, as their general equivalent.

As opposed to the young rock 'n' roller, in whom the consciousness of the destruction of the product (of all products) appears – a consciousness which, in order to be fulfilled, must re-enter the points of production in the course of a unifying movement – the consciousness of the young leftist intellectual presents itself as an *organising and apologetic* consciousness, a consciousness of work and the worker mediated by an interposed social person, which, in order to succeed in pretending to fulfil itself, must keep clear of production points, *where social reality is the materialisation of the discourse he continues to hold onto*. At the same time, his existence as a proletarian or as an increasingly proletarianised being contradicts his political consciousness more and more, which leads it to assert its ideological character even more glaringly. Either the process of proletarianisation shatters the ideology of work and politics to pieces, and he ends up joining the struggles of the proletariat, or, on the contrary, the ideology of work and politics will lead him to him to fall in line with the ranks of the organised counter-revolution.

IV – Birth of the Communist Movement

1) For several years now in the United States, and more recently in Europe, the critique of work has spread massively among proletarians remaining in the production process. This critique has many aspects: organised sabotage, as we have seen above; massive absenteeism in the majority of the most important and most modern enterprises (according to *ICO*, Nos.115–116 every day 12 percent of workers at General Motors miss work without giving any reason, roughly the same number as in Turin's FIAT, and in many factories in Great Britain there is hardly anyone there

on Monday mornings!); frequent switching of factories by the majority of young proletarians, with more or less long periods of complete work stoppage between switches.

All the aspects of this critique can be found in the same proletarians, who absent themselves from work, go on sick leave, sabotage, etc.… .

This practice proves to be a critique of capitalist production relations, and particularly of dominant surplus-labour, so it is indeed *a critique of the proletarian condition*.

Through this practice, *young proletarians assert their choice of* (non-work) *leisure time as the yardstick of social wealth*.

In leisure (non-work) there is already a possibility of *elective affinity* among those beings (even if under capital this choice remains mystified) with whom one wants to live, whereas in the factory this choice belongs to capital alone. *This choice is the conscious affirmation of the human community dominating things*, the passionate and fascinating rationality of social humanity as opposed to the icy, glacial rationality of capital: the proletarians of Detroit, USA, who leave their workshop to join their friends in other workshops, assert their *counter-choice*.[11]

The human community *will choose itself because it has only itself to consciously produce*.

Therefore, both choice of community and choice of 'leisure' as the yardstick of social wealth are already an immediate affirmation of communism.

2) However, the capitalist mode of production knows only labour time as its yardstick, and it produces leisure only in relation to work: there is a direct contradiction between the maintenance of this mode of production and the social practices of young proletarians. Besides sabotage and as its complement, this contradiction translates to two levels as far as struggles are concerned:

– Struggles at 'leisure sites', from the street to dance-halls, where young proletarians increasingly discover capital as the organiser of the space-time of non-work.

– Intensification of struggles at production sites during the time they are present due to the necessity of making as much dosh as possible in order to meet their needs during the time they are not working (constitution of a sort of social reserve). They thus become the spearhead of wildcat strikes.

Therefore, more and more young proletarians possess a practice of struggle which *covers social reality as a whole*. They assert themselves as the *possessors of a dialectical practice* which leaves nothing aside. Wherever capital is, in its various materialisations, they assert themselves as the subject of its destruction.

The critique of work movement renders its full meaning to the wildcat strike movement.

3) It was only natural that the proletarian movement should begin to manifest itself anew and globally in the spaces where it was inhibited in the 1920s and 1930s – the factories – and with a content which, after its defeat, turned it into a mere object of capital: *occupations*.

In France, where this inhibition displayed the most *democratic* character (the occupations movement of 1936), and which inherited this sort of repetition (May–June 1968), when it reappeared, the movement no longer accepted it and began to overcome it: negatively, through the absence of any attempt to reorganise capitalist production, and positively, through the desertion of the factories by many young proletarians who, whenever they could, took their struggles to the streets and onto the barricades.

It was no less natural for the proletarian movement to have been preceded and 'catalysed' by the student movement, which was simultaneously the movement of the 'proletarianised' middle class demanding 'democracy' and the movement of the *not-yet-working* population.

This is what mystified the entire movement of May '68, which proved unable to recognise itself owing to its incoherence as a result of its multiple class components and historical dimensions (past and future character). The student movement was not

superseded by the proletarian movement, which clearly shows all the limitations of May '68 and explains why the debate remained, at the time and subsequently, at the level of democracy and self-management.

4) The proletariat's movement of negation must re-enter the course taken by fascism, but reversing its direction: where the 'classical' proletariat (producer of surplus-value) had become an object, it now tends to become a subject once again. Through its dialectical practice, it constitutes *the practical leadership* of the struggles of the class in the process of its universalisation: the totality of proletarianised humanity beginning to confront capital. Through its practice – which is revolutionary only if it is a negative one – the 'classical' proletariat *renders its full meaning* to this confrontation: the struggle for the liberation of humanity. In addition to the struggles of the non-productive, unemployed, or non-working proletariat, it must integrate the struggles of proletarianised middle class strata into its movement of negation, destroying those which it cannot integrate in order not to be destroyed and/or integrated by them.

Thus, what had become frozen and petrified in the concept of a 'political dictatorship of the proletariat' by a Marxist ideology linked to capital's phase of formal domination is practically set in motion again.

The communist movement is born upon the ruins of communist ideology and against it.

V – The Old Political Rackets

1) When the domination of capital is real and total, 'revolutionary' parties turn into organisations for the party (the party of the party!)

They thus merely express their inability to place themselves on the true terrain of the proletariat's life; hence their sectarian existence, and their incapacity to organise the breaks with the system represented by the most radical struggles.

Henceforth they can only support the cause of the existence of the proletariat, since the latter is now capable of going about its own abolition *by itself and immediately*. As a result, leftist outfits are reduced to *pretending* to organise the proletariat as a community of capital within capital; hence the positive character they confer on the proletariat, but also, as a result, on capital (power to the workers!)

The various leftist groups armed with their 'classical' ideology are so many rackets championing labour and competing with each other along the lines of capital's mode of existence.

The racket form is the truth of the party form.

2) Consequently, the truth of the old parties led by intellectuals is to be found in present-day rackets, which are composed essentially of intellectuals, a phenomenon that is in keeping with their emergence as a social stratum following the end of the war. Whereas previously, intellectuals, petty or medium-sized, presented themselves as an 'ideological stratum devoid of specific social interests', capable of serving both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, in 1917 they fulfilled themselves for the first time, in Soviet Russia, both as a social class and a class of liars. A lie they are now forced to repeat indefinitely not only to the proletariat – something which is increasingly difficult for them to get away with – but above all inside *their own class*, concealing its proletarianisation from it (and thus concealing it from themselves), in order to make it evolve within the exclusive sphere of political ideology. In fact, leftist outfits exercise their racket much more among intellectuals (professors, students) than among the 'classical' proletariat, but as a result they tend to constitute themselves into rackets *over the universal class* which tends to form itself by encompassing the proletarianised strata.

However, the attitude and practice of these strata determine the future of the class struggle and, in part, its outcome. As long as the universal class has not yet actually been formed, and these proletarianised middle class strata have not *practically and*

socially chosen to confront capital in order to destroy it (which is the case when they continue to confine themselves largely to the political sphere), they may fluctuate between *revolution and counter-revolution*. This latter alternative is, at present, the more likely one, given that middle-class strata are increasingly rallying to the *ideology* of the proletariat and its *immediate consciousness* (as opposed to its social practice and its negative consciousness), a rallying which was the very foundation on which Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism were born.

Certain expressions of Maoist practice – which we will examine in the next issue of *Négation* – may even be interpreted right now as the emergence of counter-revolution.

What we call '*Maoism'* does not refer simply to Maoist organisations, which in France are indeed decomposing to a lesser or greater degree, but to the ensemble of social determinations and class consciousness that lead to a practice around which the majority of proletarianised middle classes are rallying, and in which they recognise themselves. The decomposition of Maoism in the form of 'classical' organisations is, moreover, a sign that these classes are beginning to be faced with difficulties in a much more directly social way, hence the stakes discernible in this situation: integration into the struggles of the proletariat or struggles against the proletariat.

For us, therefore, the critique of leftism as a political racket is not so much a matter of criticising the anachronistic character of the political and ideological existence of these sects than it is of understanding the *social practice* that this existence translates.

VI – The New Political Rackets (Potere Operaio)

1) Whereas in the main, France has stuck to classical leftism, in Italy a new type of racket has appeared in the form of groups like Potere Operaio (PO), which try to organise the refusal of work movement. The European strategy of this outfit is summarised in its slogan: '*political wage'*, i.e. wages for the entire proletariat, both working and non-working, regardless of any

economic considerations vis-à-vis capital, and regardless of productivity in particular.

In a word, it's generalised wage labour endeavouring to declare itself in contradiction to wage labour. The fundamental contradiction afflicting a racket like PO becomes visible straightaway: politics as a specialised activity came into being at the same time as labour became the dual producer of use-value and exchange-value. Within the historical development of value, political ideology is closely linked to the ideology of labour. When value exerts real and total domination, the material foundations of the ideology of labour and political ideology simultaneously collapse, as we have seen above.

And then PO comes along and tries to *politically* organise what is a critique of both work and *politics*.

Its 'theoretical' reasoning goes as follows: since the refusal of work goes beyond the framework of the economy (which PO considers limited to the productive sphere), this movement is directly political, hence the possibility of organising it. Now, although it is true that the proletariat, constituted as a class and abolishing itself, will realise politics by bringing it to an end once and for all as a specialised activity, all its struggles tending toward this self-organisation and suppression take place on the terrain of the life of capital, which has infiltrated itself *everywhere* by self-organising the lives of proletarians. The economy dominates everything to such an extent that it seems to have disappeared, hence the phrase 'everything is political' coined by this fetishism.

2) Consequently, several characteristics simultaneously determine and limit the existence of a racket like PO:

a) The outside-of-work movement is considered in its immediate reality, according to the position it occupies in the system, i.e., *as the negative element in this society* (just as traditional partyists and councilists consider the factory only in its immediate reality, as the positive element in this society). Now, only the

dialectic of the movement, by intertwining the struggles that take place outside-of-work space-time and factory struggles, can transform the non-labouring community from *the negative element in this society into a negation of this society*, and vice versa, confer a negating character on the factory community. PO is reduced to indefinitely consider the non-working community as the negative element *within* the system, thus endowing it with a *political positivity*, an imperative condition for the existence of any racket. As a result, PO cannot take upon itself the organisation of the destructive struggles of this community; it can only organise demonstrations in favour of the political wage which *spectacularly* oppose the demonstrations of classical rackets for the right to work. In PO's strategy, the factory movement is supposed to link up with the outside-of-work movement on the terrain of the latter, thus becoming political itself: an undialectical caricature of the class constitution of the proletariat, but due to the necessities of maintaining the racket.

Hence PO is also de-emphasising the *absenteeism* movement in which, since it is already present as in the USA, the dialectical movement of struggles expresses a communist content, proving itself to be completely impossible to organise from a political perspective.

b) Separations, even oppositions, between the different communities of the proletariat are also considered in their immediate reality as a strategic basis for European intervention *upon* immigrants.

Criticising the traditional outfits that wishfully intend to unite immigrant and indigenous proletarians, PO's intention, on the contrary, is to intensify these separations, to widen the gap in the reality produced by capital 'in order to lead it to a point of disintegration where reunification becomes possible'. Here we again come across the comical gymnastics that takes the place of dialectics for this outfit and conceals, but in fact reveals, the contradiction rending PO asunder: its racket foundation, which lies within the *very separation* of the different communities of

the proletariat. The unification of struggles *through and within* struggle spells *death for a racket* (for it means the constitution of the class by re-appropriating its historical consciousness), hence the combined strategy of exacerbating separations while promoting ideological unification *through and within* the political sphere where PO, as Consciousness, would rule.

Despite its efforts to try and dissociate itself from them, this pathetic racket can do no better than traditional leftist outfits: to attempt to organise the proletariat as a community of capital.

3) Whereas, due the present impossibility of the re-emergence of *the proletariat's immediate consciousness* – the consciousness of producers of use-value, classical rackets find nothing to sink their teeth into and are thus reduced to impotence. PO, the product of this impossibility, draws the conclusions to put together a racket critique of workers' councils,[12] in order to position itself on the terrain of the appearance of the *proletariat's historical consciousness*: the critique and the refusal of work.

This amounts to wanting to substitute itself *directly* for this consciousness – in a word, to be the consciousness of consciousness, just like the other leftist outfits want to be the party of the party – and wanting to organise its own negation as a racket! In fact, as we have seen, they cannot arrogate to themselves the fulfilment of this historical consciousness, because they simultaneously refuse to acknowledge that production points are its sphere of realisation, and they refuse to acknowledge the *real* unification of the proletariat's various struggling communities: this sums up their contradiction and their limitation.

4) Nevertheless, by intervening on the real and immediate terrain of the proletariat's existence and the birth of its negative consciousness, such rackets may not *immediately* present themselves as such, because they must stick to reality in order to try and blend in with it. They thus play a mystifying role and are a real

hindrance to struggles, hence the importance of demystifying them via a relentless critique.

Since they depend more strictly than other leftist groups on the system's evolution and on class struggles, such outfits emerge in those countries where the economic situation and struggles are among the most advanced, and they do so under different forms according to the degree of this evolution. Thus, in Italy, where PO was born, this political group emerged almost immediately as such, and is now seeking its second wind, and to recover its initial virginity, by extending itself to other European countries.

In Great Britain, where the state of the proletariat's struggles – both in terms of factory struggles and the practical proletarian critique of work – seems more advanced than anywhere else in Europe, they appear immediately in movements outside-of-work such as the *Claimants Unions* (organisations which defend the interests of the unemployed and non-workers), and at the very moment when they appear, they are already unable to present themselves in the traditional form of leftist outfits, while nonetheless calling to support the despicable National Socialist IRA along with all the other half-wits of the traditional outfits.

As for the US, they have never appeared there, and from now on the situation in that country seems to have left behind any possibility whatsoever of their coming into existence. Struggles in the US already seem to exclude any reformist possibility. The communist revolution is on the agenda there, and that means that from now on no organisation external to the class and its struggles can take hold.

In France, one of the countries most lagging behind both in terms of economic development and of struggles, it might seem that the future looks bright for a group like PO, and it has created a stammering minion for itself there in the guise of the group 'Matériaux pour l'intervention'.[13] However, this is merely hypothetical, for France is part of the capitalist world; a swift evolution and intensification of the struggles in the most advanced countries would have repercussions on France itself, and lead it directly to

the level of these struggles. This could be one of the consequences, among others, of Great Britain's entry into the Common Market.

Groups like PO seem to be the expression of an increasing proletarianisation of intellectuals and their consciousness. As far as the French group Matériaux pour l'intervention – which is composed mainly of teachers – is concerned, this seems to be in line with the ideological disintegration of this milieu, which over the last two years has become blatantly obvious: once the ideological pageantry of teaching work – 'knowledge' – is cast off, it tends to reveal itself increasingly for what it is: 'wage labour'. Hence its critique by increasingly young teachers, many of whom transfer this ideological power to politics, to the political organisation of the proletariat, thus setting themselves up as the last ideologues and the last politicians.

5) In conclusion, we might say that PO's entire contradiction is contained in its very name: to call itself 'Workers' Power' actually reveals – besides the substitution but explaining it at the same time – that for this racket the proletariat must not go so far as to abolish itself, but rather that it should take *power*, and on top of that, become *the collective worker* once again, which means that the valorisation process and the proletariat ought to backtrack and return to the historical phase when they didn't amount to all that much, and human labour and the producer of use-value meant a great deal!

Incidentally, what PO ridiculously tries to achieve with its pretension of rewriting history from the perspective of a pure Marxism cleansed of all the Social-Democratic, Leninist[14] and Stalinist shit, is a constant backwards march of history.

They are not, for that matter, the only ones to engage in this little board game: true Marxism, the one and only, unabridged, undistorted, unrevised, is appearing near you, like Jesus!

A FEW CONCLUSIONS

1) *Marxism* was an ideologisation of Marx's theory. He himself took part in this fixation, particularly in his 'political' writings and positions.

The contradiction which plagued Marx was to describe the life of a being, Capital, from its birth to its death, while living at a time when this being was still undeveloped, hence the glorification of *politics* when he attempted to translate his analysis of capitalist production relations into immediate and active reality.

There was a *terrible* contradiction between the practical possibilities of the movement – then exclusively the 'working-class' movement – which, in the main, had eminently 'political' tasks to fulfil (the establishment of republican bourgeois democracy and/or of "people's" democracies during the 1830 to 1879 period, as well as the subsequent generalisation of wage labour and the proletariat: the Second International). Thus, all of this, and the conclusions which Marx drew from his analysis of capitalism, which went beyond the limits of his *precise* time, were in contradiction. *And yet*, *in spite of that*, this analysis was linked to the *fundamentally communist* struggles of the proletariat of that time. What Marx said was a radical critique of what he could only partially achieve. He was well aware of it and more or less stated it in his correspondence. But within the immediate movement, on the other hand, Marx could only qualitatively limit the contribution of his radical theoretical work. (Witness the almost complete *isolation* of Marx and Engels on the doctrinal plane, and how they were misunderstood even by their disciples: cf. the critiques of the Erfurt and Gotha Programmes.)

Thus Marx, and Engels too, were, despite themselves, the working class movement's first bureaucrats and ideologues. The fundamental writings of the former (the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* the *Grundrisse,* the *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique…, Capital*, etc.) are only now becoming fully meaningful and truthful, because only now the capitalism described by Marx has been completely realised, and consequently communism is on the agenda.

Marx's works could therefore serve no other end than to contribute to the ideological training of the socialist bureaucracy, made up of intellectuals specialised in the wielding of dialectics

and economics – but as separate spheres – as well as of a fraction of the labour aristocracy. Marxian theory served no other purpose than to prove the necessity of capitalism thanks to the knowledge of its 'laws' (cf. Althusser) and therefore to perpetuate capitalist relations in the power of the bosses, union leaders and politicians. The fact that Marx focused on the critique of the economy is not where the rub was: the rub was that this critique of the economy came to be regarded as a science, instead of as the nucleus of the theory of the proletariat's communist praxis.

The foundation of this economism was the need to understand the capitalist economy in order to *defend* wage labour against capital (Social Democracy) or to create capitalism from scratch (Leninism).

On the other hand, this terrible dichotomy articulated the intellectual/manual dichotomy that both sides of the struggle raging within the First International, the manipulative Marxian bureaucracy and the conspiratorial Bakuninist bureaucracy, brandished as a derisory flag and a distorting mirror.

Each of the stages leading from Marx to Stalinism was the Truth of the former: Blanquist and politically-biased Marxism; economistic and deterministic Social-Democratic Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism. Trotskyism is an archaic setback; as for Bordigism, it is the false reality of the bureaucracy's Marxism, besides being its 'most scientific' expression.

Nowadays Marxism has become the discourse of the ruling class in 'Eastern' capitalism, and the academic discourse tending towards dominance in the West. The existence of both these discourses obviously demands the censorship or playing down of some of Marx's writings, distorting or fragmenting certain others, and bringing still others to the forefront.

2) During the 19th century *anarchists* were right to say that there could be no *truly proletarian State*. This statement, however, was not devoid of contradiction: among anarchists the ideology of

work was just as exacerbated as it was in the 'workers' movement as a whole.

In fact, at the time the rightfulness of their conception amounted to a humanistic *sub-utopia*, almost a religious one.[15] Anarchist ideology was not to escape – *and could not* escape – the customary fate of ideologues under formal domination: to simultaneously express and mystify the reality of capital and of class struggles.

The *truth* of anarchist ideology (twenty years after it compromised itself, like the entire socialist upper crust of that time – by Kropotkin in particular – in the First World War) was revealed in Spain in 1936, where the scandal lay not in the participation of anarchist leaders in the *republican* counter-revolutionary government, but in the *reason* for this participation: the 'collectives', considered by the anarchists to be the destruction of capitalist production relations, *there too and very soon indeed*, represented (despite the promising premises created by the magnificent class struggle of the Spanish proletariat) the potential of generalisation and rationalisation.

It is obvious that there is nothing communist or State-destroying about anarchist federalism. It is a conception linked to the birth of capitalism, a utopia that would be nothing but a historical regression (in which groups of producers would compete with one another on a market made 'fair' by the regularisation of the anti-State).

The human community is both anarchic and centralised and its foundation is the consciousness of social man.

The contribution of anarchist writings on this last point is *considerable*, even if at the time they could be little more than humanist statements bordering on mysticism, and consequently mystifying ones.

These days, when what is at stake in the proletariat's struggles is the destruction of the State and the establishment of *Practical Anarchy*, besides the stinking old vessels of yesteryear (FA[16]), anarchist ideology is peddled by sects-organisations which

model their existence on that of Leninist organisations: of the confusion of ideologies and their spectacular opposition take place at the level of rackets. This ideology is also peddled by artisanal or agricultural 'communes' that illusorily want to return to the foundations of pre-capitalist production, believing that in this manner they can escape the threefold poverty of being proletarians (You bet!), ideologues and 'ideologised' (the stink of religion).

The *radically* negative character of revolutionary anarchist literature – Bakunin, Coeur de Roy, Eric Mühsam, Malatesta, Camillo Berneri, etc. – in relation to the capitalist system, and the demand for the complete liberation of humanity on all levels which can be found in it – is a slap in the face for anarchists, just like the work of Marx is a kick up the arse for Marxists.

3) In the milieus that have left Leninism behind, the critique of workers' councils is now on the agenda, but it generally dodges the real issue at hand by merely seeing in the German councils a superficial expression of the working class,[17] or by saying that the opposition between the soviets and the Bolshevik party exists only in councilists' heads.[18] Councilists, for their part, turn the council-party relation into a rigid, almost moral, opposition: the parties seem to have had no material basis of existence or fulfilment as a substitute historical consciousness.

In reality, a real opposition did indeed exist between workers' councils and parties, and it was none other than the class's potential for autonomy vis-à-vis its political representations; this opposition, however, was not rigid; what opposed both of these terms was a bond, and what bound them to each other was an opposition.

For the 1920s German councilist Otto Rülhe, the proletarian was only a proletarian in the factory; elsewhere he behaved like a petty bourgeois, etc…. . As we have seen, the proletarian was a proletarian to start with because he had no means – of production and subsistence – to avoid being one. Nowadays, this councilist conception, which back in the day had real foundations

due to the limits of the struggles of the time – apart from the ideological nuance of the 'petty bourgeois' misnomer – represents a complete misunderstanding of struggles and is an ideological hindrance to the understanding of the revolutionary movement which is once again taking shape. All neo-councilists (not to mention the moronic GRCA-type para-situs, whose recent folding is their only trademark[19]) are confined to forming political organisations for the advent of the power of workers' councils (cf. the recent councilist merging between *Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils* from Marseilles and *Révolution Internationale* from Toulouse and Paris, with the preposterous Organisation conseilliste from Clermont-Ferrand[20]): in a word, it is the topsy-turvy partyist racket all over again in an even more laughable form.

However, if it must be firmly stated that the proletarian is only a proletarian in the factory, the fact that his existence in the production process is increasingly decisive must be stated no less firmly.

The fulfilment of the destruction of capitalist production relations depends ultimately and *fundamentally*, therefore, on the abolition of the proletariat within the process and in the space where it takes place: *the factory*. Consequently, councils may reappear as organisations of struggle, but their content must be completely different and even opposed to that of the German and Italian workers' councils and the Russian soviets. They must take root within a movement of destructive struggle that encompasses *social reality in its entirety* (the entirety of space and the ensemble of proletarianised human beings – thus including non-productive proletarians and non-working proletarians in particular, of which the State is no more than the police regulator). They can be nothing short of *proletarian councils* – and this is no mere matter of words, given the unification of the proletarian being – which immediately begin to abolish the production-valorisation process.

As the comrade who wrote 'Capitalism and Communism' says:

> [T]o revolutionise production, to destroy enterprises as such, the communist revolution is bound to make use of production. This is its essential 'lever', at least during one phase. The aim is not to take over the factories only to remain there to manage them, but to get out of them, to connect them to each other without exchange, which destroys them as enterprises.[21]

Councils can only appear in order to abolish themselves.

In other words, as the final assertion of the *practical leadership* of the fundamental proletariat in the course of the movement, they can realise economic and social democracy in order to destroy it once and for all by destroying any separation between being and thought, for the delegation of human powers upon which *all democracy* – direct or indirect – depends, cannot survive the advent of the human community.

4) Theory has no other role to play than to be the *global* expression and *clarification* of the *consciousness* that proletarians possess of their situation and of their struggles, a consciousness that is *indissolubly linked* to their practice, and to simultaneously *explain and update* the development of the revolutionary movement. Opposing any ideology which attempts to substitute itself for this consciousness (self-managing, organisational, etc.) is part of this *clarification*.

This implies that 'theoreticians' have no *immediate* and *historical* class interests opposed to those of the proletariat universalising itself, within which they must already be *practically and socially* included; and this implies, in turn, that they are no longer anything but 'theoreticians.'

5) Labour, the organic exchange between 'man-the individual' and nature, is, in fact, destroyed by the capitalist mode of production itself, which, by gradually socialising it, transforms it into a single profit-making function, and thus into alienation for

the whole of mankind and nature. The proletariat must destroy this function by *abolishing itself*. In so doing, it brings about the destruction of individual human labour in a *humanly social sense*; it liberates humanity and nature by reconciling them, and lays the foundation of a productive social activity that may be defined as the organic exchange between social man and nature.

The summit of prehistory is reached when capital achieves real and total domination over labour and society, and tends to destroy man's natural environment. *The movement* inherent in men's social relations then seems to vanish, and only *the fixed character of things appears*. Nonetheless, the movement lives and develops beneath the capital-commodity: every productive act is a social movement, and *the capitalist mode of production is an antagonism in motion*, the development of a contradiction. And at the very moment when the movement *spectacularly* disappears, it lives *anonymously*, invisible to the eyes of what is alien to it. It develops into the negation of the fossilisation of things and of capital, until it becomes generally visible once again by invading areas that had remained blind to it until now. *Due to it, and within it*, everything is slowly set in motion once again.

The breaking point with capital is the point in which the moving character of man rediscovered dominates the fixed character of things; once labour comes to an end, so does human prehistory.

> As the system of bourgeois economy has developed for us only by degrees, so too its negation, which is its ultimate result. We are still concerned now with the direct production process. When we consider bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole, then the final result of the process of social production always appears as the society itself, i.e. the human being itself in its social relations. Everything that has a fixed form, such as the product etc., appears as merely a moment, a vanishing moment, in this movement. The direct production process itself here appears only as a moment. The conditions and objectifications

> of the process are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are the individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew. The constant process of their own movement, in which they renew themselves even as they renew the world of wealth they create.[22]

> Communism, like love, is everything living, everything which is immediate, every sensuous experience, any and every real experience, the 'Whence' and the 'Whither' of which one never *knows* beforehand.[23]

6) For us, obviously, revolution is not inevitable; but what *is* already inevitable, is the double confrontation of the fundamental proletariat with capital and the middle class strata, already proletarianised or on their way to proletarianisation. If the proletariat incorporates these strata into its destructive struggles, then the vast majority of proletarianised humanity will confront capital in order to destroy it. If, on the contrary, proletarians allows themselves to be absorbed into the immediate struggles of these middle-class strata for democracy and thus for capital, the antagonisms that the latter's very existence foster between the different components of the universal proletariat – and even within the fundamental proletariat – can only become exacerbated and result in the physical self-destruction of humanity, in its negation *by triumphant capital*, with no other perspective than this partial or complete destruction.

What is at stake in the class struggles of today is either the negation of the proletariat or the negation of the human species. Hence the importance of detecting the emergence of the counter-revolution in advance.

We will develop these conclusions and the other essential points of this text in subsequent publications.

1

10/18 (Union Générale d'Éditions, UGE). French publishing house founded in 1962 that exclusively published paperbacks (about 10×18 centimeters, hence the name). (Translator's note).

It published the first widely distributed translation into French of the so-called Sixth Chapter of Capital, Karl Marx, *Un chapitre inédit du Capital ... Traduction et présentation de Roger Dangeville,* (Trans. Roger Dangeville), Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1971. This text is known in English as 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', available in the standard English edition since 1976, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1,* (Trans. Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach), London: Penguin, 1990, pp.948-1084. Quotations in this translation of Négation's text from these two key texts follow the standard English translations by Martin Nicolaus, Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach, respectively. However, as mentioned in the Editors' introduction, several important translation issues affect the choice of terminology throughout Négation's text, most importantly the tendency, inherited from Dangeville, of translating subsumption (as either *domination* or *soumission*). We have therefore chosen to retain Négation's use of these two terms throughout the text, presenting the quotations from Marx in their authoritative English translation and providing footnotes to the specific French editions used in the original (Editors' note).

2

A. Aumeeruddy and R. Tortajada provide some further context on this key text. 'The "Results of the Immediate Process of Production", sometimes known as the "lost chapter" of *Capital,* this was written between June 1863 and December 1866 and was first published in 1933, simultaneously in German and Russian. […] It was originally planned as a transitional chapter between Volume I and Volume II of *Capital,* as it is not definitely known why Marx discarded it. It contains both a synthesis of the argument of Volume I, and a further development of the relations between "value" and "use-value" in terms of the subsumption of labour to capital. It completes the argument of Volume I by investigating commodities not only as the premise of the formation of capital but also as the result of capitalist production. "Only on the basis of Capitalist production does the commodity actually become the *universal elementary form of wealth.*"' A. Aumeeruddy and R. Tortajada, 'Reading Marx on Value: A Note on the Basic Texts', in Diane Elson (Ed.), *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism,* London: Verso, 2015, p.7. (Editors' Note).

3

Respectively, *ouvrier* and *oeuvre* in the original text. (Translator's note).

4

See *ICO (Informations correspondance ouvrières)*, No.115-116, 'Counter-planning on the Shop Floor' ('Le contre-planning dans l'atelier'), [March–April1972] despite the author's propensity to self-managing interpretations, which come at the cost of many visible contradictions within the text itself. Address: Blachier, 13 bis, rue Labois-Rouillon, Paris 19 ème.

5

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (Trans. Martin Nicolaus), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p.703. Karl Marx, *Fondements de la critique de l'économie politique ébauche de 1857–1858 2, 2*. (Trans. Roger Dangeville), Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1968.

6

The CFDT (*Confédération française démocratique du travail*) was created in 1964, when a majority of the members of the Christian trade union *Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens* (CFTC) decided they preferred to form a secular union. In 1974, many CFDT members joined the Socialist Party led by François Mitterrand, abandoned the self-management project and advocated aligning themselves with the European social-democratic model. (Translator's note).

7

Cf. James Boggs, 'The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook', *Monthly Review,*

1963, http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/amreboggs.html (Translator's note).

8

ICO No.93, available, https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/JYK/info (Editors' note).

9

See the text 'Pour une théorie des chapelles' ('For a Theory of Chapels'), published in *Noir et Rouge*, No.44 which represents a remarkable attempt to describe this phenomenon, http://archivesautonomies.org/IMG/pdf/anarchismes/apres-1944/noiretrouge/NR-n44.pdf (Translator's note).

10

'Syndicats extra-productif' (Editors' note).

11

Cf. 'Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor', op. cit.

12

Which is more likely to be fulfilled by the councils as a substitute historical consciousness (cf. PO's text on the councils in Germany and Lenin, which we don't know from what pamphlet or book they drew.)(Translator's note).

13

Martin Adler, B.P. 42-06, Paris. A group founded by Martin Adler who issued a short-lived series of pamphlets between 1971–2, some of which are archived here: http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?rubrique123&lang=fr (Editors' Note).

14

As a matter of fact, PO never engages in a real critique of Leninism; occasionally it seems about to do so, but then ends up completely justifying it. For that matter, this is also the case of many different groups which have 'superseded Leninism' without ever having criticized it!

15

The *utopian* current (Fourier in particular) had a more rational understanding of society, which may be considered intuitively brilliant even, but on the other hand, completely devoid of practical effects on proletarian struggles. What is remarkable is the link-up between the utopian Fourierist current, the anarchist workers' movement, and the radical struggles from 1830 to 1870, which was best expressed by Joseph Déjacque and was already a clear and luminous vision of the goals and the means of communism.

16

The Fédération anarchiste (Anarchist Federation) is a Franco-Belgian anarchist federation that has been a member of the International of Anarchist Federations (founded in 1968 during an international anarchist conference in Carrara). (Translator's note).

17

Invariance No.1, new series. Jacques Camatte. B.P. 133 (83) Brignolles. (Essential texts, incidentally, to be completed by the reading of Informations et Correspondances Ouvrières' pamphlet 'Fondements de l'économie communiste'.) Both texts can be found at http://revueinvariance.pagesperso-orange.fr/serieI.html and http://aaap.be/Pdf/Transition/Transition-fr-Foundations-ICO-1971.pdf (Translator's note). English versions of some of the key *Invariance* texts are available. Gianni Collu, 'Transition', 1969, (Trans. David Brown) in *Origin and Function of the Party form 1962: Essays by Jacques Camatte and Gianni Collu*, Ed. David Brown, London 1977, available https://www.riff-raff.se/en/furtherreading/transition.php and Jacques Camatte and Gian Collu, 'On Organisation' (1972), in *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*, New York: Autonomedia, 1995, pp.19–28. https://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/capcom/on-org.htm (Editors' Note).

18

Jean Barrot, *Leninism and the Ultra-Left*, available at La Vieille Taupe, 1, rue des Fossés St. Jacques. Available in English, http://www.prole.info/texts/leninismandtheultraleft.html (Translator's note).

19

Groupe Revolutionnaire Conseilliste d'Agitations. French pro-situ group. (Translator's note).

20

'Under the influence of 'Révolution Internationale', which was originally council communist and close to ICO in 1968-70, and of its leader Marc Chirik,

an ex-Trotskyist, and later ex-Bordigist militant, who returned from Venezuela to France in 1968, the latter two groups ended up merging with this last one (1972), to finally form an international group (ICC) in 1975.' (Philippe Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–68)* (Translator's note).

21

Le Mouvement Communiste No.2, G. Dauvé, B.P. No.24, 93 Bondy. An English translation is available, Gilles Dauvé, 'Capitalism and Communism', 1972, http://www.prole.info/texts/capitalismandcommunism.html (Translator's note).

22

Grundrisse, op. cit., p.712. Karl Marx, *Fondements de la critique de l'économie politique ébauche de 1857–1858 2, 2,*. (Trans. Roger Dangeville), Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1968. op. cit.

23

Karl Marx, *The Holy Family,* in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Vol.4: 1844-45,* (Trans. Richard Dixon and Clemens Dutt), London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p.23. Karl Marx, *Le Sainte Famille,* no edition or publication details provided in original.

Afterword – Négation: from the Abolition of Labour to the Search for the Subject of the Revolution

Roland Simon

This text revisits the inception of the group Négation through their first issue and evaluates the achievements and problems of that project through a close analysis of some key themes on the occasion of its first translation into English and publication in this book. Page references to the original French publication are followed by references to the translation in this book. Translated by David Bremner.

In an explicit manner, the first issue of *Négation* situates revolution and communism upon the integrality of an historical arc defined as that of labour:

> Labour, the organic exchange between 'man-the-individual' and nature, is, in fact, destroyed by the capitalist mode of production itself, which, by gradually socialising it, transforms it into a single profit-making function, and thus into alienation for the whole of mankind and nature. The proletariat must destroy this function by *abolishing itself*. In so doing, it brings about the destruction of individual human labour in a *humanly social sense*; it liberates humanity and nature by reconciling them, and lays the foundation of a productive social activity that may be defined as the organic exchange between social man and nature. (*Négation* No.1, p.34 and pp.118–119in this book).

Things are as simple as a negation of the negation: capital destroys 'authentic work', human but individual, by socialising it as production of profit; communism re-establishes authentic 'humanly social' work by recuperating its socialisation. Starting from the 'critique of work' and its complement 'the self-abolition of the proletariat', in 1972 *Négation* had practically completed the circuit of the problematic of theoretical humanism. Arriving at the point where the proletariat abolishing itself was man rediscovered again, *Négation* posited the necessity of conceiving revolution and communism as resulting from the whole history of alienation conceived on the basis of a 'dynamic principle': that of 'labour'.

> The summit of prehistory is reached when capital achieves real and total domination over labour and society, and tends to destroy man's natural environment. *The movement* inherent in men's social relations then seems to vanish, and only *the fixed character of things appears*. Nonetheless, the movement lives and develops beneath the capital-commodity:

> every productive act is a social movement, and *the capitalist mode of production is an antagonism in motion*, the development of a contradiction. And at the very moment when the movement *spectacularly* disappears, it lives *anonymously*, invisible to the eyes of what is alien to it. It develops into the negation of the fossilisation of things and of capital, until it becomes generally visible once again by invading areas that had remained blind to it until now. *Due to it, and within it*, everything is slowly set in motion once again. The breaking point with capital is the point in which the moving character of *man rediscovered* [my emphasis RS] dominates the fixed character of things; once labour comes to an end, so does human prehistory. (Ibid., p.35 and p.123 in this book).

But why should the proletariat be the subject of this transformation? The danger was of making capital the veritable principle of the revolution, and thereby founding communism only *negatively* as what capital itself in its dynamic requires but cannot accomplish: the abolition of labour and value. *Négation* wards off this threat by making the proletariat the culmination and realisation of the history of labour. As consistent theorists, the editors of *Négation* do not content themselves with considering humanity as any sort of principle or tendency, subsisting in spite of everything in the throes of alienation; they consider alienation to be *in real terms* the necessary historical trial (*le procès*) of humanity. This being established, the concept of self-abolition becomes necessarily teleological. By grounding its revolutionary critique of capital on labour and not on the exploitation of labour, *Négation* succeeds in making 'the critique of work' the critique of a social relation, of exploitation, up until the moment *just before the revolution*, at which point it is obliged, by its own premise – the 'critique of work' – to drop the proletariat, which 'by definition' cannot lead beyond labour. At this point, the proletariat must become humanity, but in order for the proletariat to become

humanity, it was necessary that in it, even though contradictorily, it was *already* humanity that was being realised.

Négation posed a pure antinomy between the struggle of the proletariat against capital in the midst of the capitalist mode of production and revolution as the proletariat's self-abolition. The first can only be programmatic and cannot produce the second as its overcoming. 'Taking up the cause of the proletariat is obviously the opposite of taking up the cause of its abolition. In itself, this already constitutes clear-cut proof that *only* the proletariat – constituting itself as a class on the basis of its generalisation to humanity as a whole – can take up the cause of its own abolition.' (Ibid, p.9 and p.91 in this book). The negation of the proletariat is therefore the product of its generalisation to the whole of humanity. What is there to say, except that it negates itself because it is already no longer a class?

It is for *Négation* this process of generalisation which confers a strong importance upon struggles in the domain 'outside-of-work' *(extra-travail)*. These struggles are determined by the relation of the proletariat to capital within the framework of exploitation (unemployment, exclusion, the colonisation of everyday life by the commodity), but they also foreshadow – by virtue of the domain in which they operate, beyond labour – the principle of constitution of this 'universal class' which, by no longer really being one, will be able to meet the task of negating itself.

> Today, the unemployed [the proletarians outside the production process] are *the very product* of this development [of the capitalist mode of production] reaching its end in the industrialised nations. From now on they constitute *commodities with no future*, *no longer able or no longer willing* to expend themselves within the capitalist production process. They are, in a certain sense, *the extreme outposts of a system whose every possibility has been historically explored by them*, and as a result, they become even more potential commodities. […] When these communities

of non-working and sporadically-working proletarians revolt against the capitalist order, they exhibit a destructive potential that calls the entire rationality of the system into question. Indeed, given the extreme position they occupy, these struggling communities *expose the entire system* and the very organisation of their existence as commodities.

[…] Through looting they criticise an existence beyond which lies nothing but the human community freed from capital. Such were the black riots of 1965 in the United States, which showed a strong communist potential. […] Therefore, by destroying the material foundations of labour and its ideology and creating communities of interests situated beyond work, and thus potentially beyond capital, the latter creates *its adversary* and the very foundations of its abolition: the product and its ideology *are nothing* when the possibility and the consciousness of productive labour have largely dissolved.

Due to their purely destructive character, these struggles, the potential negation of the capitalist order, are politically *unorganisable* from outside. For what we are dealing with here – contained in the refusal of work or the impossibility of gaining any access to it – *is the proletariat's historical consciousness*, born and developed from both the dissolution of the ideology of work and the dissolution of political ideology. Historical consciousness has emancipated itself from its ideological usurpation: the refusal of work goes hand in hand with the refusal of politics.

In these struggles, revolutionary consciousness presents itself in the immediate form of *a consciousness of the destruction of the product*, of *all* the products of the system. This consciousness cannot be realised within these struggles or on their terrain, that of outside-of-work space-time; it must make its way into the points of production where

> the wretched production and reproduction of the commodity existence of these communities takes place. (Ibid., pp.18–19 and pp.102–104 in this book)

Négation may well go on to affirm that the destruction of the capitalist relations of production rests ultimately and fundamentally on the negation of the proletariat in the process of production in the space where it takes place (the factory), but this nonetheless means that, in this process, the proletariat puts itself on the level of these extra-labour struggles. Thus, this 'fundamental proletariat' (Ibid., p.34 and p.124 in this book) confers upon these struggles, through its power to transform production and its modalities (the destruction of the framework of the company), the possibility of becoming effective, positive, as the production of socialised humanity; it carries them over and beyond their limits. The proletarian, in whom the development of capitalist production has denied 'the consciousness of the worker' (Ibid., p.9 and p.93 in this book), can 'take the side of abolishing himself' (Ibid., p.11, p.94 in this book). The practical possibility of the abolition of labour links up with the thesis of 'communities who are already beyond labour'.1 (Ibid., p.19 and p.98–103 in this book).

For *Négation* it is from within what historically the proletariat is that the capacity to abolish labour unfolds; the proletariat does not mask humanity, it itself *becomes* the capacity to abolish labour. But this is also *Négation*'s limitation. Not only is the necessity of a dialectical and teleological construction of 'the history of labour' thereby founded, but, above all, and correlatively, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital is in actual fact situated outside of itself, merely designating and reflecting *another contradiction*. It exists only *as animated* by the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, which themselves express those of the history of labour.

During the phase of formal subsumption of labour under capital,[2] there is a:

> ‘dichotomy’ between *the specificity of the capitalist mode of production* – wage labour – and *the similarity between the capitalist production process* and its forerunners: in this phase, the labour process is, if not dominant, at least very important, and its foundation is the human being.
>
> 2) Consequently, in the production process the proletarian is endowed – equally, let us say – with the double character of a producer of use-value (worker) and a producer of exchange-value (proletarian). *Hence the ‘dichotomy’ within the proletariat itself*: as a potential (potentially dispossessed) commodity, *he is fully proletarian*.
> – As a commodity that circulates and exchanges itself – as wage labour – *he is fully proletarian*.
> – As a specific commodity operating within the production process, *he is both a proletarian and a worker*, and first of all a worker.’ (Ibid., p.6 and p.87 in this book)

It follows that, on the level of the production process, it is the consciousness of the producer of social wealth which dominates the consciousness of the producer of surplus-value.

> Once capital reaches the stage of real domination, the (human) labour process is absorbed by the valorisation process, in the sense that the production process becomes increasingly social and scientific, and (human) labour subsists essentially as the source of valorisation for capital, i.e., the source of surplus value production. In other words, surplus-labour increasingly dominates necessary labour, and the latter is increasingly performed by the machinery and technology that replace the human being, which essentially remains within the process only as a surplus-labourer. […]
>
> Workers subjected to increasingly accelerated work rates feel the effects of the *humanly asocial* [my emphasis RS] character of such an organisation. Through this,

> it is the effects of capital they feel: abstract exchange-value producing labour *comes into existence and materialises for them, as it were, in the very organisation of labour*; this is one of the aspects of the *unification of the proletarian being*, whose full existence as a surplus-labourer within the production process now catches up with the full existence of his dispossession as a wage labourer. (Ibid., p.14; p.97 in this book)

It follows that 'For factory workers, the transformational consciousness regarding their situation can only be destructive and negative as far as the organisation of labour is concerned; and consequently, it can only be destructive in relation to the production relations, because these relations *present themselves directly in the organisation of labour*.' (Ibid., p.15 and pp.97–98 in this book).

In this historical construction the proletariat reaches only the point at which it personifies the obsolescence of labour, where it is finally the executor of the sentence which labour has pronounced against itself through the capitalist mode of production. *Négation* replaced the contradiction between the proletariat and capital with a contradictory history of labour in capital. This sometimes leads to strange assertions, such as that regarding necessary labour, assumed by machinery, whereas surplus labour would be shouldered by man. *Négation*, in order to construct its history of work, assimilates necessary labour to concrete labour and abstract labour to surplus labour. So much so that the destruction of labour involves 'transforming the means of production into an automatic process.' (Ibid., p.14 and p.98 in this book)

More fundamentally still, the contradictory development of labour in capital, of which the proletariat is only the bearer, refers in turn to another contradiction, that of capital with 'human sociality'.[3] It is here, for *Négation,* and, in general, for any 'critique of labour' developed in a theoretically coherent way, that the real contradiction will in the last instance be found. From *Négation's* speculative construction, it follows that when we reach the end of

the history of work, the negation of labour having been effectuated by capital and embodied in the reunited being of the proletariat, this latter only brings the end of labour and not the production of communism. It is precisely the problematic of the collapse of programmatism seeking its overcoming in the critique and refusal of work that we find again here.

The impasse of this problematic lies in the fact that we start from what is recognised as already a social relation, work, to construct the historical sequence of social relations. To get out of this vicious circle, one is then forced to confer upon the 'social relation' constituted by work a hybrid content qua social relation, which means it is not really one at all: a social relation founded upon a natural necessity. Work then evolves incessantly between social history and natural history, between social relation and relation to nature. It is futile to say that the relation to nature is in fact a social relation, because one is still constrained to consider it as a social relation of a peculiar type, insofar as it is upon it, on the basis of its characteristics and its contradictions, that one will subsequently go on to construct all historically determined social relations. Fundamentally, the theories of revolution as crisis and abolition of labour cannot but regard the history and dynamics of the contradictory social relations of class inauthentically; as 'forms' of labour. With the real subsumption of labour under capital, which in this problematic marks the completion of the historical cycle of labour, the dynamic of these social contradictions also draws to a close. The 'end of labour' henceforth lacks a social support to ensure its transcendence – hence, at this moment, the need for the proletariat as a class of the capitalist mode of production to give way to a 'class' which is, qua revolutionary subject, already 'universal'. The proletariat does not abolish itself because it effectuates the revolution and abolishes capital, rather it effectuates the revolution because in fact *it has already abolished itself in this 'universal class'*. It is because work has been posited as a notion anterior to historical social relations – a sort of meta-social relation – that no historical social relation can, once the negation

of labour has occurred, contain the dynamic producing its transcendence. The theories of society as the dynamic of labour end up locking themselves into this impasse.

It is here that *Négation* falters in this first issue, and the following issues will only bring further decline in the theme through critical analyses of self-management (Lip), of abortion or school: labour is in crisis, labour is potentially dead in the proletariat. All this without ever managing to positively produce communism starting from the crisis of labour, because this is impossible. On the basis of history as dynamic of labour, the proletariat only leads us to the end of labour. The problem for *Négation* will always be, from there, to positively construct the movement of the production of communism.

1

Here the author paraphrases rather than quoting directly from the text. Négation do not write here or elsewhere of 'the consciousness of the worker' but rather of 'La conscience prolétarienne' (p.10 in the original), i.e. 'proletarian consciousness' (p.93 in this book) and 'conscience historique du prolétariat' p.9, rendered as 'the historical dimension of the proletarian consciousness' (p.93 in this book). Regarding other citations on this page, the exact phrasing is as follows in the original and then the translation: 'jettent las bases de sa propre négation', (p.11 in the original) is rendered as 'lays down the foundations of its own abolition', (p.90 in this book); 'communautés de non-travailleurs' (p.23 in the original) is rendered as 'non-working communities' (p.103 in this book). These differences are noted here to retain both the integrity of emphasis on Simon's part and equally that of the translators' work on these two texts. (Editors' note).

2

Simon here uses the French phrase *'subsomption formelle'* where throughout their text, Négation use the term *'domination formelle'* in line, at least partially, with the translation of the *Results or Unfinished Sixth Chapter of Capital* by Roger Dangeville in 1971 which used a combination *soumission formelle / soumission réelle* and *domination formelle / domination réelle* to translate the concepts formal and real subsumption. An extended discussion of these issues of translation can be found in the introduction to this book and details of the publication history of Marx's works in the 'Timeline of Subsumption'. (Editors' note).

3

Again, this is not a term used directly in this context by *Négation*. (Editors' note).

Once upon a time my love
and I studied philosophy and history
and evangelized all rapists
and racists in the world so that
they were then all good. The End.
A narrative ends when there is nothing more
to say. What is there to say
when there is no rape? What word did the
world's
first raped person utter?
Slimy, I notice
the snot trickle down the back of my throat.
White, and yellow. White, and yellow.

<>

Shake! Shake!
Not enough energy.
Shake! Shake!
Our forces are under attack.
Shake! Shake!
Nuclear launch detected.
The ghost, he dies at the end.

<>

Arguments

Arguments

History, System and Subsumption

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia

Saenz De Sicilia's PhD thesis *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx* (2016) (soon to be available in book form from Brill), is a work which goes further than any Marxist analysis to date in recovering the pre-Marxist origins of the concept of subsumption in German philosophy. Saenz De Sicilia uses this research to illuminate Marx's use and transformation of the category for his conceptualisation and presentation of capital. This contribution however does not simply draw Marx's theoretical achievements back into into the empty halls of philosophical tradition. Rather, the essay presented here focuses on the way in which subsumption in Marx's work mediates between system and history, or structure and experience of structure. Through close attention to Marx's innovations the essay develops a materialist account of subsumption, by which the concept is thoroughly transformed from its ideal or cognitive basis in German philosophy and resituated within a living praxis which takes human activity as its medium of existence.

One of the fundamental tensions within Marx's writings arises from the complex relationship between the systematic and historical aspects of his description of capitalist society. A century and a half after the publication of *Capital* – and in light of the historical adventures of communism that must, for the most part, be considered as an accumulation of catastrophic failures – this tension continues to both energise and attenuate the reception of Marx's thought, symptomatically expressing the radically distinctive and still elusory practical-theoretical foundations of his project. On the one hand, capital is depicted by Marx as an ensemble of social relations forming an apparently closed totality capable of reproducing itself purely through its own internal dynamism: capital as self-sufficient system. On the other hand, Marx reminds us that the capitalist mode of production does not fall from the sky but grows out of, or violently breaks free from, the economic structures of feudalism, developing within and in antithesis to past relations and technologies: capital as historical in nature and therefore subject to the turbulent play of conflictual forces shaping and propelling human history. For Marx the capitalist system is a whole, a totality of interlocking relations that presuppose and support one another. Yet at the same time, it is not a whole with a timeless, independent, self-moving existence, an essence suspended in the void. Capital does not develop from nothing but is a historical phenomenon subject to temporal emergence and decay amidst a whole host of 'disturbing influences'.[1]

The 'becoming' of capital as a system is thus dependent on a mode of development that is simultaneously a negation, absorption or negotiation of inherited social relations and forms (of wealth, technology, knowledge, institutions, identities, practices, etc.) and their subordination to the logic of its own 'life-process'. As first and foremost a social relation *of production*, Marx describes, in just a few scattered fragments, how capital subordinates – or 'subsumes' – existing forms of production in order to configure them as capitalist valorisation processes, engines of profit for their owners.[2] As Marx outlines,

this can occur 'formally', simply through a transformation of the economic relationships involved in production (with the introduction of relations of exchange between buyers and sellers of labour-power). But subsumption under capital, Marx notes, can and does also occur in a deeper, 'real' form, which transforms the material composition of production (the techniques and technology of production as well as the products themselves). Both at the economic and material levels, Marx thus identifies the *mechanisms* by which specifically capitalist forms of social domination come into being, transforming existing apparatuses of production and property relations in order to secure the extraction of surplus labour from workers in the form of surplus-value. These 'formal' and 'real' modes of subsumption (along with further, 'hybrid' forms identified by Marx) constitute mechanisms of domination, mechanisms through which the becoming of capital, the augmentation of its exploitative and transformative power over human life, is achieved.[3]

Once a sufficient degree of such subsumption has occurred, once a sufficient mass of social substance has been incorporated and formed in accordance with capital's life process then we might say that the system is no longer simply becoming but has attained 'being' and, infamously, seems to stand upon its own hind legs independently of the human hands which animate it. Marx describes the 'being' of capital as an organic system, that is, a system capable of reproducing its own conditions of existence, sustaining itself through a cyclical metamorphosis which passes through a necessary sequence of stages or 'forms' regeneratively. Yet capital's peculiarity is its need to expand, to accumulate. By definition capital cannot survive by 'simply' reproducing itself, by regenerating itself exactly as it was when its life cycle began. It must, rather, reproduce itself in an expanded form. It is driven onwards and outwards to absorb an ever greater wealth of material that it can claim as its own through commodification, exploitation and accumulation. The *being* of capital thus implies no rest or stasis but rather *constant becoming*, constant growth, a spiralling

outward of its centripetal energy which runs up against multiple barriers: the resistance of workers, the finitude of nature, even against its own destructive drive for insatiable accumulation.

If the becoming of value toward more value, its axiomatic expansion, is systematically presupposed and necessitated by capital, how does this correlate with the other becoming of capital, its historical becoming (and anticipated eventual death) as a finite form of social production? When, how and as an effect of which social forces will capital's reign over human life come to an end?

Revolutionary (Im)possibilities

As is well known, for Marx these were first and foremost practical questions, that nonetheless generated prolific theoretical reflection. In the tension which emerges between the being and becoming of capital, its 'organic coherence' yet historical transience, the Marxist problematic of revolution is central. Does revolution follow a progressive arc of necessity, emerging into actuality when capital's 'time has come'? Or does communist revolution rather subsist within and against capital from its beginning, as the ever-present possibility of overcoming that it harbours immanently within itself? The objectivist posture of the former, for which revolution follows a quasi-naturalistic or divine teleology, independent of any individual desires and intentions, is inverted in the subjectivism of the latter, for which revolution emerges as the voluntaristic interruption of capitalist normality, Walter Benjamin's 'emergency brake' on the train of historical progress.[4] In light of communism's multiple defeats and capitalism's monopolistic installation as the sole economic paradigm of the modern world system, neither standpoint would appear to offer a particularly credible horizon of revolutionary anticipation. To the historical objectivist, we may ask when? To the subjectivist, we may ask by who? Furthermore, in the absence of any revolutionary challenge to capital's reign, what are we to make of its unchecked becoming? Might capital's *being-becoming* approach a point of total absorption and saturation of the human life world, not only

'formally', but also 'really'? Might this point have already been crossed, leaving us in a 'post-historical' abyss with no way out?

Because of its implied consequences for the character and organisation of production, and thereby also for the struggles that grow out of production, Marx's tentative and fragmentary conceptualisation of capitalist subsumption has provided an evocative focal point for debates surrounding the transformations (or death) of labour-oriented revolutionary politics. If communism is first and foremost a workers' movement, and the experience of work is shaped by the particular forms of domination operative in production, then an analysis of these forms and their evolution would seem to offer at the very least a point of departure, if not a comprehensive blueprint, for engaging critically with the trajectories of struggle that have the overcoming of capitalist social relations as their ultimate horizon.

The theory of capitalist subsumption – if such a theory can be said to exist – compresses synoptically the central significance of the analysis of surplus-value production in *Capital* in an account of capital's tendency to transform not only the directly social and economic aspects of production (with the generalisation of waged work and its corresponding worker-boss power relation) but also the material and technological aspects of production (with the reconfiguration of the labour process and the ascent of the machine/algorithm). In this way, Marx was able to index the experience of specific forms of class-based interpersonal domination and 'objective' alienation (the power of the boss and the machine over workers) to his analysis of the structure and dynamics of capitalist accumulation (the production and realisation of surplus-value, at both a micro and macro level).

For subsequent Marxist thinkers concerned with the historical fate of revolution, subsumption provided a technical vocabulary with which to designate the evolving relation between specific mechanisms of power and the overall dynamics of the capitalist system, between the experience of subjection to the command of capital and the guiding tendencies of accumulation. A putative

theory of subsumption was thereby seen to offer the key to grasping not only the 'objective' path of capitalist development but also 'subjective' programs of resistance to it, thus uniting the configuration of conditions from within which revolution must emerge.

This reception of subsumption within Marxist theory has been by turns bombastic and muted, creative and conservative, deployed to diagnose the epochal shifts in capitalist power over society as a whole (as a linear movement through phases of formal, real and eventually 'total' subsumption) or to re-affirm the consistency of a basic logic governing every real and possible instance of capitalist socialisation (as in capital-logic and value-form theory). That is, interpretations of the theory have largely fallen on one side of the tension between history and system with which our discussion began. There is little need to rehearse these debates here, save to note that whilst the latter tendency may claim greater conceptual coherence and fidelity to Marx's texts, it is the former that has been more energising for critical debates, capturing the generalised, if fuzzy, sentiment that capitalist power has evolved and intensified to such a degree that it now invades and interferes with every aspect of our lives, offering no apparent way out. Real subsumption, accordingly, has for many come to stand as a catchword for the imperious enclosure of life by capital, like the map described in Jorge Luis Borges' fragment which entirely covers the territory it represents, coinciding with it 'point for point'.[5] No longer restricted in its effects to the 'rationalisation' of discrete labour processes, capital's logic of coercion and technical efficiency would, on this reading, penetrate and transform the entirety of human existence such that, in Antonio Negri's formulation, 'society itself has been converted into a factory' or in Theodor Adorno's prognosis, 'the "alteration of the technical composition of capital" is prolonged within those encompassed, and indeed constituted by, the technological demands of the production process'.[6] It is not only the worker's labour – a specific quantum of their time – that becomes 'one of the modes of existence of capital' here, but the worker's entire

life, workers (and indeed, non-workers) *as such*, individually and collectively, in their inner and outer being. This conception of real (or in some variants 'total') subsumption would thus encompass all that capital has done and continues to do to our world and ourselves, whilst simultaneously circumscribing the evaporating terrain of revolutionary possibilities, their tendential or even consummated impossibilities.

Such interpretations of subsumption imply a theoretical short circuit whereby the logic of power specific to capitalist production is transposed onto the social totality in an unmediated and absolutised way, sacrificing a nuanced operation of Marx's critical apparatus in favour of a sensational rhetorical diagnosis on the present. Those who have sought to demonstrate the misreading of Marx at stake in these attempts to map formal and real subsumption onto historical phases of capitalist society have, by contrast, toiled to reinsert the theory of subsumption into a systematic account of capitalist relations in their essential structure. Yet the difficulty here is that while different forms of subsumption in production do not directly correspond to distinct phases of global capitalist development, those forms – in particular real subsumption – do have profound transformative effects that ripple outward through the broader sphere of life, reshaping the overall context of social action and struggle. The secure theoretical footing offered by a systematic account of capital's being essentially remains silent on the question of capital's historical becoming (and overcoming), other than through an affirmation of the unchanging laws and tendencies of accumulation which supposedly govern its developmental trajectory. The result is a decoupling of the system from its history which 'freezes' it in time.

It thus becomes clear that despite their apparent opposition, both interpretations of subsumption – the systematic and the historicist – reinforce the idea that at an ideological and practical level capital has effectively achieved the suppression of its own subjection to historical finitude. In doing so they sever the critical analysis of capitalism from the constructive problem of its

revolutionary overcoming, aborting Marxism's central task.[7] To interpret subsumption from either a purely historical *or* systemic perspective undermines precisely what is theoretically forceful and unique about the category of subsumption with respect to this task.

Subsumption has a privileged status within the Marxist conceptual apparatus because it marks the *interface* between capital as system and capital as history. Whereas categories such as value, commodity and capital are internal to the totality of capitalist form-determinations, subsumption designates the point of articulation between this organic 'system-in-process' and the historical substance through which it lives, which it must absorb and reform in order to exist. As we have seen, it is only through the subsumption of existing social forms of production that capital can emerge into being and establish itself. And even once this has occurred in its 'real' form, Marx insists, it continues to radically remould 'all its social and technological conditions' through a 'constant revolutionising of production'.[8] Subsumption is thus *the* category of mediation relating the capitalist system to its external and internal foundations, which of necessity are subject to the flux of historical time. Whatever is indicated by subsumption is thus that which joins capital as system to the history that it both resides within and acts upon.

What, then, is indicated by subsumption? Here is where the problem resides. Given Marx's rudimentary sketch of subsumption, its tentative appearance in drafts and notes and its failure to be integrated into the final version of *Capital*, the weight it seems to bear as the principle category of mediation between capital's systematic and historical aspects is not supported by a developed conceptual framework. Lacking a robust apparatus of its own the theory of subsumption has, as a result, been subordinated to two competing schemas of totality which have dominated Marxist thought: a systematic dialectic that totalises synchronically and a philosophy of history that totalises diachronically. Each of these in its own way functions to disarm the revolutionary tension between the form and content of capital, between the system and

its history, between the perfect ideal and imperfect materiality of exploitation. In order to reactivate this tension on the plane of theory, so that Marxism can remain operable as a discourse which tracks the movement of a dynamic and unstable system, of concrete conditions which continually deform their own space of possibilities (to borrow a phrase from Guiseppe Longo), it is necessary to explore what exactly is at stake in the category of subsumption, both in its philosophical pre-history and in its passage to becoming a materialist category adequate to the critique of capitalist domination.[9]

A 'Critical' Concept of Subsumption

The sporadic yet insistent appearance of the term subsumption throughout Marx's writings, from the early critiques of Hegel through to *Capital*, is symptomatic of the complex and ambivalent relation his work has to the German philosophical tradition. Much difficulty around the construction of a coherent Marxist conceptualisation of subsumption stems from a failure to appreciate the depth of this relation and the degree of continuity manifest in Marx's critical orientation, not only with Hegel's dialectic, but with an entire constellation of problems animated at least as early as Kant. Above all, it is clear that many commentators, in spite of the deceptive clarity of their exposition, have failed to grasp the rich reconceptualisation which subsumption itself undergoes in this tradition, thus restricting their analyses to a simplistic and formal conception of what is at stake in the subsumptive relation *per se* (even prior to its capitalist specification). This reductive engagement then establishes the conditions for the integration of Marx's theory of subsumption into the dominant schemas of systematic dialectic and philosophy of history (or, worse, to justify abandoning the concept of subsumption altogether). Whilst seemingly far removed from the urgency of debates over the fate of revolutionary movements or the deepening of capitalist control over work and everyday life, the aporias within which the discussion of 'real subsumption' now appears

confined can perhaps only be resolved through a reassessment of this philosophical inheritance.

Subsumption is broadly understood as a concept of classification or categorisation. In its most abstract and general philosophical form, it designates *a relation of belonging to a class of things*, of *incorporation into a more general category* or *into a formal unity*, as particulars are related to a universal, or species to a genus. Traditionally, then, subsumption has concerned the problem of ordering or organisation, of establishing a hierarchy between terms, ranging from the most particular to the most general: 'Plato' is subsumed under the genus 'man', which in turn is subsumed under the genus 'animal', and so on. The roots of such a hierarchy lie in Aristotle's taxonomic schema of being, formalised graphically in Medieval thought as 'Porphry's tree'.

This is the meaning which subsumption had in pre-Kantian philosophy. Yet, if this was the sense in which Marx used the term when speaking of the 'subsumption of labour under capital' it would not enable him to pose the problem of subsumption in its properly 'critical' form. Which is to say, beyond the problem of logically organising pre-given elements or tracing relations within a given system, he would not be able to develop an interrogation of how those elements come to be constituted in the first place, how they are given form such that they can be made to fit within a systematic totality; how, for example, human activity, which is common to all societies, comes to take the form of a commodity, as 'labour-power', which can be purchased and thus incorporated into capital's accumulation process. This is precisely what Marx must uncover if, in the course of his critical exposition of the system of political economy, he is to show *how* labour becomes one of the 'modes of existence' of capital and to demonstrate that this requires a specific conjunction of historical conditions and forces, rather than expressing a 'natural' relation of belonging. Without the Kantian intervention into the discourse of subsumption, Marx's use of it would express only that labour is incorporated into capital because, tautologically, it pertains to capital within the

logic of the system. That is, it would offer no critical leverage on the constitution of the system and its historical impermanence.

Let us turn, then, to Kant's critical reframing of subsumption. At first sight Kant's use of subsumption seems to retain its straightforward and traditionally logical form. Indeed, the 'transcendental logic' which Kant developed and within which his account of subsumption figures was modelled upon the 'general logic' outlined above. But Kant goes on to add a new and highly significant dimension to the problem of how a judgement of subsumption can be enacted: that of the heterogeneity between the elements that are to be related in the judgement. He asked not how subsumption is possible in its formally logical sense, as an ordering connection of thought determinations, but rather, in analysing the conditions of possibility for any experience of an object, he asked how sensibility and the understanding – cognitive faculties that are 'entirely unhomogeneous' with one another, and thus generate representations that are different in kind – could be connected subsumptively. This is a problem because, 'in all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representations of the former must be *homogeneous* with the latter'.[10] This homogeneity is necessary because subsumption always implies identity: that which is subsumed under a category is said to be a particular instance *of that category*, whilst the subsuming category 'inheres' *in* the particular, which is to say, is embodied *by it*. Whatever is subsumed under some category or form *is* that category or form, in some basic sense specified by the nature of the system ('Socrates' *is* a man and 'man' is embodied *in* Socrates). But whereas logical subsumption deals with universal and particular elements of the same kind (conceptual representations) that only have to be located appropriately within the system according to their generality and specificity ('animal' being higher than 'man' but distinct from 'mineral', etc.) transcendental subsumption deals with non-conceptual elements (sensible representations) that nonetheless are to be subsumed under concepts. How is this identity between unalike elements possible? How can sensations

be adapted to concepts, such that they can be presented as 'belonging' under them? This is the basic problem of subsumption in its 'critical' form.

Superficially, we can note that Kant's response to this problem rests on the necessity of a 'third thing' which mediates the connection between sensible and conceptual representations (for Kant, this is *time*, given that both types of representation contain a schema of 'time-determination'). Yet this 'solution' (that is, in fact, no real solution but only a displacement of the problem) obscures the deeper invention at work in Kant's reformulation of subsumption: the productive act of 'form-determination' by which sensible representations are constituted as particulars for concepts, and so can be presented as subsumed under them. Beyond a relational distribution of homogeneous elements, situated at the appropriate level according to their rank in the systemic hierarchy, Kant exposes a mechanics of cognitive production whereby any particular subsumed under a concept must first have been *produced* as a particular through an act of form-determination. The particular element must have been reworked and endowed with conceptual form in order to participate in the system's internal economy.

For Kant, this form-determination occurs through a dissolution of the spontaneous and singular form of unity which the object initially has when received by the senses and its subsequent rearticulation according to a generic schema of conceptual relations. Through this productive process, every object of experience comes to share in the same basic set of organising determinations, a universal form of objectivity common to all subjective experience (both within an individual consciousness and between subjects). Aesthetic representations are subsumed under the 'pure concepts of the understanding' so that something 'unthinkable' becomes 'thinkable', something private becomes communicable. The configuration of an initial 'given' series (sense data) is dissected and its elements are resynthesised according to the logic of a second, dominant series (pure concepts) that determines their unity in a new way. Those elements, in their new interconnected

form, now instantiate the universal, abstract 'form' of objectivity in a particular, concrete object (for Kant, the abstract, 'empty' concepts become filled with a sensible 'content'). In this way, the elements of the first series are subsumed under the second series *through a process of synthetic form-determination*. This process forms the object generically, such that it can be related and compared with other objects and so integrated within the system (of self-conscious experience) according to its appropriate place.

Kant thus shows that only through the unifying form-determination of the 'transcendental synthesis' – the division of that which is given to sensation and a subsequent synthesis governed by the concepts of the understanding – can the identity (of particular and universal) implied in subsumption be produced. Rather than solely exploring how *particulars* relate to *universals*, the question of how *individual* or *singular* entities (perhaps even *pre-individuals*) first come to be formed as particular instantiations of a general category thereby also enters into view.[11] The problem of subsumption does not consist in slotting isolated elements into a pre-given structure naturalistically or theistically (that is, assuming their pre-ordained commensurability and belonging to a harmonious order) but of the appropriative reconfiguration of one series or topological distribution according to a second; a form-determination achieved through procedures of division and recomposition. Kant's model is one of production, a fusion of elements that do not in themselves 'belong' together. More important still, it is not simply that the two types of representation (concepts and sensible intuitions) in the subsumptive relation are heterogeneous *per se*, but that they possess kinds of unity that obey heterogeneous logics (the aesthetic and the discursive). Sensibility generates an entirely different kind of unity (a spontaneous, unrepeatable unity) to that determined on the basis of conceptual relations (which are by definition universal and generic). Kant's account of transcendental synthesis centres on the negation of one kind of unity or organisation that is alien to the dominant logic and its re-formation according to another,

thereby enabling the subsumed entity to be absorbed within the framework of a system.

Subsumption and System

This is the deeper, 'critical' problem of subsumption which Kant establishes and within which Marx's use of subsumption is inscribed, a problem which reaches to the foundations of systematicity, asking which processes ground the emergence of a basic, objective set of relations and forms, rather than taking those relations and forms as given 'by nature'. It marks the threshold at which the discourse of subsumption moves from structure to genesis; from taxonomic arrangement to a genetic analysis of the formal homogeneity presupposed by all taxonomy; from a problem of recognition to one of constitution. Acknowledging the distinctive outlines which the problem of subsumption takes on in its properly critical, post-Kantian form is crucial if we are to fully grasp the significance of subsumption in Marx's thought, the status and interconnection of the different forms of subsumption under capital that he outlines, and the political horizons of action implied in the notion of 'real subsumption'.

Considered from the critical standpoint outlined above, subsumption is not simply a procedure which articulates or surveys the internal organisation of a system (understood as an ensemble of forms and their relations) but is rather a category of mediation between such a system and the content or substance which it seeks to form, which it needs in order to live. To speak of forms of subsumption is to speak of modes of *incorporation* into a systematic totality; this is precisely what is at stake in the subsumptive relation, as much for Kant and Hegel as it is for Marx (despite the radically different contexts and evaluations of subsumption in their writings). Subsumption in its critical conception denotes not merely belonging but the process by which such belonging is effected, a process of form-determination which shapes particulars *as* the particulars of that which subsumes them. As we have noted, already with Kant – however obliquely

and incompletely posed – subsumption implies moving from the analysis of relations between given things to an analysis of their production, prefiguring the transition Marx makes in *Capital* from the analysis of exchange, as relations between commodities, to the production processes whereby those commodities come to be. Marx is not only interested in the position of the worker within capitalist society or how their labour functions within the cycle of accumulation, but also in how individuals are *formed* as workers, how labour is *formed* as wage-labour, how surplus-labour is *formed* as surplus-value, how the product of labour is *formed* as a commodity, etc. In short, all of those processes of form-determination on which the being and becoming of capital depends and in which its life-process are expressed.

However, recognising the theoretical transition from given elements to their production processes does not exhaust the scope of transformation which subsumption undergoes in this critical phase of thought, whose interrogations span from pure reason to political economy. The central question opened up by Kant's intervention is as follows: if subsumption is not merely the recognition and distribution of elements within a system but depends on the *productive process* of synthesis by which the subsumed entity is formed as a *particular* instance of the *universal* which subsumes it, what is the nature of this formative process? What do we speak of when we speak of the form-determination of that which is subsumed? How does the division and synthetic recomposition 'work'?

Kant offers notoriously technical and intricate answers to these questions, all of which ultimately rely on an innovative reworking of classical and early modern conceptions of how the intellect functions (procedures of analysis, comparison, deduction, etc.). In this sense his account of the form-determination of objects of experience is eminently idealist in character: it occurs as a 'judgment', involves multiple procedures of cognition and generates purely subjective effects that make no claim on things as they are in themselves. And yet, however unconsciously it

is presented, there is undoubtably a proto-materialist impulse in Kant's account of subsumption insofar as he recognises the resistant 'materiality' and heterogeneity of the sensible 'content' that is to be formed conceptually in order for such objectivity to be engendered. Unlike Hegel, for whom content and form merely *appear* to be exterior to one another but are in truth linked organically as necessary moments of a single encompassing 'idea', Kant recognises that subsumption involves a kind of arbitrary or contingent transition between diverse logics of organisation.[12] There is nothing about sensible representations as such that necessitates their discursive reconfiguration (there exist beings that feel but do not think) but because the system into which these representations are to be internalised is discursive in character, it demands this reconfiguration in order to be able to incorporate them. The system must form the matter that it needs in order to function, and lives more the more it forms (otherwise, Kant says, conceptual form without sensible content remains 'empty', lifeless). This view was the result of Kant's acceptance that there was no metaphysical or logical guarantee underpinning a correspondence between the order of our experience and a 'real' order of things outside of the mind. The subject could not merely 'intuit' the order of the universe but rather had to generate it in the first place. Unless one adheres to the notion of an absolute and totalised order of forms established by a creator god, one is forced to acknowledge that every discrete system depends on the formation of contents or substances that obey diverse and heterogeneous logics of organisation. A system thus lives to the extent that it can successfully form-determine such content in according with its own logic, which is to say, produce it as a moment of its own existence and so *subsume it.*

Metabolic Materialism

Marx's great invention, which would establish the foundations for his account of capitalist subsumption, was to take up this insight and repose it in materialist terms. For Marx, the immense power

of form-determination that was so central to German idealism was undermined by its limitation to processes of a subjective and ideal character, to theory rather than practice. Marx sought to liberate the force of this synthesis by grounding form-determination not in the dynamics of cognition – processes of conceptual analysis and synthesis, judgement and syllogism – but rather in what he, following Feuerbach, emphatically referred to as the 'real life' of 'real individuals', a notion of life grounded in human flesh and blood instead of rarefied ideas. In this way, Marx's early 'humanism' recoded German idealism's conception of a subjective activity which unfolds in an abstract, ideal domain, transforming it into a conception of objective activity ('*gegenständliche* Tätigkeit') which plays out in the material domain of human-nature interactions. Marx theorised the essential structure of these practical interactions with increasing precision throughout his writings, conceptualising them as acts of *labour* and, more broadly, processes of *production*. The synthesis underpinning capitalist subsumption derives its content from this materialist conception of 'real' human activity as production: a process of form-determination grounded in the transformative and appropriative relationship between social individuals and their material environment.

Developing a materialist account of subsumption thus implied reconstructing (rather than rejecting) the idealist account of form-determination, according to the character and constraints of the human-nature relationship as it plays out on the stage of history, rather than according to the character and constraints of discursive cognition as it plays out within a 'pure' rational subject. Crucially, from the 1850's onwards Marx began to conceptualise productive activity as bound by the conservationist laws of metabolic interchange (the exchange of matter and energy between an organic system and its environment) stipulating that human labour 'can only proceed as nature does […] can only change the form of the materials' it works upon, through 'composition and division' rather than pure 'acts of creation'.[13] Just as with Kant, form-determination here occurs by a dissolution of some previous

organisation of the 'content' and its subsequent re-synthesis according to a new schema of objectivity.[14] However, Marx's metabolic reconceptualisation of this process not only establishes material (rather than cognitive) constraints on how it can occur, but founds the objectivity of its resulting product upon an entirely different logic of form, one in which practical *instrumentality* rather than pure rationality is the guiding principle.[15] Accordingly, through labour (as it is enacted in a technically structured production process) human agents are able to appropriate matter and energy in its 'spontaneously' occurring natural forms and rework it in order to produce new, 'synthetic' forms of objectivity that more effectively satisfy their needs and wants. The notion of 'form' at work here, does not simply denote some new physical organisation of the material (although this is a necessary condition) but the instrumental end which the material is intended to serve (e.g., the satisfaction of hunger, or the cutting of trees). Labour thus enacts the subsumption of physical material under a practical end, a form-determination of the material which endows it with a novel or enhanced usability.

The objective forms which are thereby produced – what, in the context of Marx's analysis of the commodity are designated 'use-values' – are forms whose possibility is conditioned by the inherent properties and limitations of the natural materials from which they are composed. However, this conditioning places only a constraint on what and how humans can produce. Within Marx's materialist framework there is no necessary connection leading from content (natural material) to form (practically useful thing). Instead, as Marx repeatedly affirms, this connection varies contingently across time and place, always being determined by a particular society and its 'mode of production'.[16] Furthermore, as Marx insists, the needs that are to be satisfied through the production of use-values are themselves variable and evolve in relation to the development of production: new forms of production generate new needs in an unceasing creative spiral which describes the becoming of history.

The objective forms that result from the synthetic activity of labour are thus always specific to a certain society and can so be properly thought of as *social forms*. Their production is a process of *social form-determination*: a society practically determining (that is, inventing and actualising) the forms it gives to the natural resources at its disposal so that, through collective effort, collective needs can be satisfied. Modes of production can be thought of as contrasting, and often competing, logics of material organisation or synthesis; instrumental and technical logics which govern the construction of social forms of objectivity. These objective forms are resources for satisfying needs and thereby securing the reproduction of the individuals that make up the society which produces them, as well as all of the material conditions of their existence (that is, the reproduction of the society as a whole). The satisfaction of needs offered by such produced resources can have a greater or lesser temporal and technical immediacy: an animal hunted and cooked satisfies physiological needs directly whereas the cultivation of crops or the formation of complex infrastructure, scientific knowledge, communication networks, etc. satisfy needs in a less direct manner (for example, as 'means of production') or simply satisfy needs that are less 'urgent' (in a physiological sense).

A survey of human history would appear to suggest a developmental tendency toward increasing complexity and mediacy of the objective forms which, taken as a totality, constitute the instrumental apparatus which a society has at its disposal to satisfy its needs and secure its own reproduction. However, it can by no means be deduced from this that historically successive societies constitute a progressive 'advance' or increasing perfection in ethical or political terms. To do so would be to confuse the degree of potency or complexity of the instrumental apparatus – a society's capacity to dominate and transform nature, both inner and outer – with proximity to divine salvation or the realisation of an ideal society (this is the suicidal technocractic conceit shared by fascism, Stalinism, capitalism and, more recently, strands of

'accelerationism'). Given that for Marx neither human needs nor capacities are fixed 'essentially', it would be an error to treat the objective aspect of human existence as a neutral means for securing a basic and unchanging biological existence (this would be an entirely unhistorical perspective, as Adorno emphasised).[17] All objective forms, rather, are complex syntheses of natural materials that have particular 'political' ends encoded and expressed in them materially: they are endowed with a specific practical orientation bearing the mark of the society that gave rise to them.[18] A key result of Marx's metabolic materialism is that the relation between (social) form and (material) content is deprived of any logical or metaphysical necessity. Instead its development is left open to historical contingency, not of an absolutely indeterminate kind, but as a task of negotiation with the concrete conditions that are inherited by each generation, so that history must be 'made' but not under conditions chosen by those who make it. Against this backdrop, technical advance implies the continual generation of new possibilities (and threats) which delimit the contours of struggle, replacing nature-imposed constraints on human activity with socially-imposed constraints that are transmitted historically in relations, institutions, techniques and technology, culture, etc. The making of history, Marx shows us, is thus not only achieved in punctual moments of upheaval and rupture, of direct contestation upon the stage of 'politics', but also in the gradual and at times imperceptible evolution of the objective forms and relations regulating (and in turn regulated by) the metabolic construction of a life-world (in this sense, 'politics' might be said to simply be a specific and communicatively refined mode of productive activity in general).

There are two basic senses of subsumption operative in this general outline of social reproduction, prior to its specification as capitalist social reproduction. First, the subsumption of some mass of material (encountered in a naturally or historically given configuration) under practical forms of objectivity, which is implied in every act of labour. Second, the subsumption of social individuals (those who produce) under a 'mode of production'

which regulates their labour activity through a particular conjunction of social relations and technical forces.[19] Both are processes that determine a historically and socially specific form of unity among elements whose prior unity first has to be dissolved (a prior 'objective' unity: *the tree*; a prior mode of production: *feudalism*).

A fundamental reciprocity obtains between these two moments of subsumption in that a 'mode of production' is constituted through human practice (which is form-determining as such) yet comes to shape human practice; it is an objectified result of action that acts back upon the active subjects that bring it into existence and sustain it. Or, to put this in temporal terms, it is a structure produced by past activity that comes to determine future activity (although for much of human history and for many of those subject to them, modes of production have appeared as immutable structures, a matrix of 'second nature' rather than explicitly 'artificial' and impermanent forms of life that can be contested and remade). Mapping this onto the critical model of subsumption outlined above, it can be said that the metabolic appropriation of natural material that occurs in labour is the mechanism by which the system of collective human existence (as some particular 'society') integrates the 'content' it needs in order to live, endowing it with a practical form appropriate to the society's particular needs. Correspondingly, the subsumption of individuals and their form-determining activity under a 'mode of production' is what guarantees systemic cohesion among all of the discrete acts of labour (and consumption); it unites and determines the overall configuration of all of the discrete forms and their production, aggregating them as a functional totality (just as, for Kant, the transcendental unity of apperception unites every discrete act of subsuming intuitions under concepts, binding them all together in the continuum of a single self-conscious experience).

Capitalist Subsumption

When Marx speaks of capitalist subsumption – more precisely, of the 'formal' and 'real' subsumption of labour under capital – this

entire model of metabolic form-determination and social reproduction is presupposed. For Marx, the subsumption of labour under capital is a shorthand which expresses abstractly, as a relation between two elements, what is in fact a relation between two processes: the labour process and the valorisation process. In this relation, the labour process (the metabolic activity of practical form-determination outlined above) is subsumed under the valorisation process (the 'miraculous' increase of capital achieved simply through the cyclical metamorphoses of its forms). Through its subsumption under the valorisation process the labour process acquires a new 'form' or logic of organisation, it has suddenly become 'about' or 'for' something entirely different to that which has historically been its primary purpose. It is no longer oriented towards the satisfaction of needs (however unevenly that satisfaction may have been distributed among social individuals and classes) but now serves the goal of increasing abstract wealth and further, expanded production. In this new form, the labour process becomes the material engine of economic accumulation, a subordinate aspect or moment of capital's life processes:

> *The labour process posited prior to value, as point of departure* – which, owing to its abstractness, its pure materiality, is common to all forms of production – here reappears *again within capital*, as a process which proceeds within its substance and forms its content.[20]

However, as we have seen, in contexts where subsumed and subsuming elements are in some sense 'heterogeneous', we have not adequately grasped subsumption simply by stating what is subsumed under what (we have merely presented it). What is demanded is to explain *how* something comes to be subsumed, to trace the underlying synthesis, the concrete mechanisms of form-determination whose *result* is the subsumptive relation as a *fait accompli*.

Formal and real subsumption describe strategies or mechanisms by which the labour process is adapted or reconfigured (*form-determined*) such that it becomes a valorisation process, and so can be effectively integrated into the system of capitalist accumulation. This primarily involves subordinating the intrinsic goal of labour (the production of use-values) to the goal of valorisation (the production of surplus-value) such that the accumulation of capital rather than the satisfaction of needs comes to be the principal logic of organisation (the 'social form') governing production. Given that surplus-value production is achieved only through the *exploitation* of surplus-labour, what is involved here are mechanisms for ensuring and perfecting the exploitation of labour.

(1) With formal subsumption the capitalist uses their 'formal' ownership of the worker's labour time (a contractually agreed duration of work) to appropriate a surplus of product 'containing' surplus-value. In exchange for a wage the capitalist has purchased the right to use the worker's capacities and appropriate the results. By their legally entitled command over labour, acting as 'capital personified', they are thus able to form-determine this activity as *surplus-value producing* activity, rather than merely use-value producing activity (ensuring, for example, that work is done to a sufficient standard and with a competitive level of productivity).[21] It is only in this way that labour has acted *as* capital – has effectively valorised an initial sum of value, increasing it. The form-determination of the labour process as a valorisation process, achieved through this 'formal' right of ownership and command, is how, in the most basic sense, labour is subsumed under capital, made 'one of its moments', even though the labour process remains essentially unchanged in its technical methods or objective results.[22]

(2) Real subsumption designates a second mechanism for form-determining the labour process as a valorisation process. Rather than relying on the capitalist's economic power over labour to ensure its adequate exploitation, real subsumption involves a reconfiguration of the technical structure and material

composition of the labour process itself, in order to maximise the production of surplus-value. Here, the metabolic basis of production, which has become the material content of a capitalist social form, is altered in its *materiality* by the capitalist. The labour process is transformed not only socially, in terms of the economic relationships and forms through which it is organised, but at the level of the activity of labour itself and the technologies that enable and orient this activity. The worker is now not only subject to the direct domination of the employer, but also to the indirect domination of the instruments and objects that the worker must use in order to realise their metabolism with nature, in order to work at all. Tracing this deeper sense of form-determination through the successive stages of cooperation, manufacture and large-scale industry based on machinery, Marx shows how real subsumption brings about a complete transformation of the modern labour process.

As Patrick Murray has noted, the contrast between formal and real subsumption establishes a distinction between 'social' and 'material' mechanisms of form-determining the labour process (though of course, in a less direct sense the social *is* material and *vice versa*).[23] Maintaining focus on how these mechanisms actually operate, it is crucial to stress that this form-determination occurs as a process of domination and exploitation, that capitalist subsumption is not an 'automatic' process driven by a logic of natural or historical necessity but an inherently antagonistic and contested social process. In striving to determine the labour process in a new form corresponding to the end of valorisation (an end which is intrinsically contradictory to workers' interests and well-being) capital encounters a resistant materiality, an 'obstinate yet elastic barrier'.[24] This is not simply the resistance of a 'passive' materiality as occurs in every act of labour, the inertia of a natural form that seeks to remain as it is (if, indeed, nature can be said to be 'passive' in this way) but of the 'active' materiality of workers' subjectivity, a subjectivity capable of posing its own ends in place and against those of capital.

The antagonism arising from the tension of these conflicting and fundamentally incompatible ends expresses itself in two aspects of the capital-labour relation: the interpersonal and the technological. On the one hand we can speak of the 'active' resistance of labour to its exploitation by the capitalist, of the rift between the two claims on labour famously dramatised by Marx in his chapter on the working day: the worker's claim over their own body (which bears the capacity for labour) and the capitalist's claim over the commodity they have bought (the use of that capacity).[25] On the other hand, real subsumption clearly expresses a strategy of maximising this exploitation by other means than direct interpersonal command. Which is to say, rather than relying on managerial discipline and the threat of unemployment to motivate the worker's productivity, the owners of the production process can reconfigure its technical structure in order to make the workers exploitation an objective feature of that process. Here, the worker must toil not because a capitalist commands it but because the means of production do. The labour process itself is designed to exploit the worker, and so, in order to work at all, the worker must submit to this objective apparatus of domination, becoming a means to *its* end rather than vice versa.

This inversion of the means and ends of production is at the core of the problem of real subsumption, which Marx describes as rendering capitalist power, exploitation and alienation a 'technological fact'.[26] Yet the significance of real subsumption is not limited to the immediate context of exploitation and subjection of the worker in production, it also bears on the wider problem of the historical being and becoming of capital. With the increasing complexity and integrated character of the instrumental forms that have emerged in modernity and whose constant revolutionising is presupposed in capitalist accumulation, the social means of production, taken as a totality, pose the threat of locking humanity into the social logics of the present. That is to say, the destructive logics of class domination and unbound capital accumulation become increasingly built into and presupposed by the technical

apparatuses humanity depends on to live. Driven by competition, capitalists ceaselessly strive to implement ever more effective ways of increasing the productivity and exploitability of labour, but in transforming the labour process, these effects bleed out into the rest of society, which, after all, is composed materially of all of the products that result from these discrete labour processes. Gradually, patterns of consumption, the formation of identities and consciousness, social institutions, infrastructure and communication, international relations – in short the entire life-world of humanity – comes to be reshaped by the effects of a process whose driving logic is capital accumulation.

Yet to whatever degree this vast machinery of domination expands and envelops the totality of what we might call life, we have seen that the power of capital is rooted in its effort to control production, in its subsumption of the labour process in which the practical form and instrumental purpose of the means of social existence are decided. This subsumption, furthermore, is riven by tension and conflict, revealing the struggle at the core of the attempt to integrate the resistant materiality of labour into the system of capitalist social forms. In its resistance, labour expresses its being as something other than merely identical with the form and goal it is subsumed under in this system (a system within which it appears as 'variable capital'). It is an element that refuses to submit to the new synthesis imposed upon it, either recalcitrantly or by proposing another synthesis altogether. What is at stake here is not simply a question of worker control and autonomy, but of which ends the human metabolism with nature serves. Capitalist subsumption involves a struggle over the form determination of this metabolism (as a 'labour process') and its product, which by implication is also an indirect struggle over the form-determination of society as a whole. It is in this sense that we can grasp real subsumption as the crucial point of mediation between the abstract being of capital as a system and its concrete historical becoming. By appropriating the human metabolism with nature, capital has hijacked the practical mechanism by

which human societies reproduce their life and world, subverting the qualitatively evolving interplay between productive capacities and consumption needs (the basis for all historical becoming). Whilst this metabolism has for much of history served to sustain contexts of exploitation and class domination, the specificity of its capitalist subsumption is its reorientation toward an abstract, purely quantitative end. This is why Marx claims that, through real subsumption, 'only capital has subjugated historical progress to the service of wealth'.[27]

Conclusion

Was it necessary to take this Kantian detour, through concepts, cognition, synthesis and form-determination in order to adequately address the relation between capital as system and capital as history in order to confront the problem of real subsumption and its implications for revolutionary struggles? It is not difficult to anticipate the criticisms that such a 'philosophical' framing of these problems might elicit, a framing that may at first sight appear to pull Marx back into the theoretical field from which he sought so intently to escape in the early years of his intellectual formation. Yet, paradoxically, it is only by addressing the critical refounding of subsumption which occurs within Kantian philosophy that we can appreciate the full significance of this category for Marx's developed materialism and critique of political economy. It is a case not of an abstract negation of the philosophical outlook but one that appropriates its elements whilst transcending its limits.

We have seen how two proto-materialist aspects of subsumption in Kant's thought open the possibility for Marx's reworking and redeployment of subsumption. Firstly, the recognition that 'matter' is internally differentiated, or organised according to heterogeneous logics of form (discursive, aesthetic, etc.). Secondly (and related), the rejection of a 'naturalistic' internalisation of all forms within a single, closed system of being or space of possibilities, a creationist model of the causality of things

which would guarantee their co-belonging and harmonious unity in advance (Kant's objective, after all, is precisely to mitigate the totalising excesses of reason). Without Kant's intervention, those pre-critical commitments would imply conceptualising subsumption as little more than the hierarchical arrangement of already formed entities, a situating of things according their appropriate place within the order of creation. Kant's model, by contrast, is one of production: a synthetic fusion of elements that do not in and of themselves belong together. This enables the problem of subsumption to be posed as two-fold. First, *how* (or by which process) is form determined? Second, *which* forms are to be determined? Both of these aspects of subsumption are relativised according to the specificity of the systemic context within which subsumption occurs.

Appropriating and intensifying these Kantian innovations, the critical elaboration of subsumption as synthetic form-determination is torn by Marx from its idealist context ('cognition') and recoded as a description of the metabolic process of material production ('practice'). Insofar as capital is conceptualised as a system of social forms through which material production is organised and directed (a 'mode of production') this system possesses historical actuality to the extent that it *subsumes* (and thereby transforms) existing forms of production such that they become capitalist production processes, with all of the social and material repercussions we have seen to result from this. Different forms of capitalist subsumption (formal, real, hybrid) designate the different modalities of this process of reconfiguring production and dominating workers, and thus different articulations of the abstract logic of capitalist accumulation with concrete historical forms of social production and reproduction.[28]

What are the consequences of disregarding the critical and materialist reorientations of subsumption traced above? Without the deeper scope afforded by a metabolic conception of form-determination, the critique of capitalist subsumption enables, at best, the acknowledgement of some indeterminate

remainder or surplus of particularity ('non-identity', in an Adornian mode) that is erased in the subsumed particulars, yet without being able to explain where that remainder comes from or is exiled to. The analysis of the negations inherent in capitalist domination cannot thus be linked with any concrete positivity from which its overcoming might issue. Whilst such accounts acknowledge the contradictory unity of universal and particular which the relation of subsumption implies in its philosophical history of (above all in the thought of Hegel) they nevertheless fail to see how this contains a deeper problem (form-determination) which is intensified by the displacement of subsumption from the ideal domain of thought forms to the material domain of social forms and the practices by which they are constituted.[29] It is precisely in this problem of material form-determination that positive *history* (the evolving configuration of social reproduction) and social *system* (the logic of capitalist accumulation) can be effectively related from a revolutionary standpoint. Occluding the centrality of this problem of mediation in its concreteness, contemporary Marxist debates have become mired in the antinomies of totalisation and abolition, in the speculative contemplation of a completed capitalism ('total subsumption') and the millenarian fantasies of its entire annihilation. Only an account of subsumption that is framed around the problem of form-determination (that is, 'critical') and grounded in the idea of a metabolic relation of production (that is, 'materialist') can dissolve these aporias and offer an alternative approach to capital's being and becoming that remains linked to present conditions.

An alternative approach of this kind would distinguish itself by treating the distinction between forms of capitalist subsumption outlined by Marx as only the starting point, rather than the horizon of its investigations. Instead of fixating idealistically on the completeness of labour's 'inclusion' and its evolution through progressively deeper phases or periods of subsumption (or simply indulging in the incoherence of such a periodisation), this approach would take the 'density' and 'direction' of

subsumption as key materialist lines of enquiry, exploring the multiple trajectories of subsumption and spaces of possibility produced by them as co-existing and interacting moments of capitalist development. Whilst formal subsumption renders capitalist relations socially objective, with real subsumption those relations (and the 'system' they imply) become materially objective as they are inscribed within the technical logic of the production process. As this inscription proliferates, the totality of the instrumental apparatus with which capitalist society reproduces itself becomes shaped and oriented axiologically, such that it has the goal of capital accumulation and social domination built into it as a 'technological fact'. However, this is not one-dimensionally a case of technology becoming irreversibly or immutably 'capitalist'. We can instead speak of a certain technological ambivalence with respect to 'path dependency' and social transformation: technical forms contain a plastic multiplicity of actualisations, the possibility of being refunctioned and activated for other ends, a possibility that is continually repressed by capitalist relations rather than permanently erased. The crucial question for revolutionary thought is not how 'much' or how 'complete' the process of material domination is in the present, but in what ways it configures the terrain of struggle and collective organisation against capitalist power.

Such an enquiry can only take place as an interrogation of the shifting relationship between production and reproduction, which is to say, of how the development of the labour process and struggles over production are articulated with other domains of social life, and so how production is situated *within* reproduction (as a total process). This involves tracing a reciprocal movement of effects in two directions: 'outwards', given that what occurs in production then shapes the material conditions of society as a whole, and back 'inwards', given that the formation of individual subjects occurs as much outside of work as at work, and these subjects are those who then (at least potentially) resist and enter into struggles in, over and against work. The question thus has to be how other domains outside of immediate production support

the processes of exploitation that occur within production, whilst at the same time generating points of tension and resources for counter-activity.[30] There can be no simple or deterministic schema of causality from production to society, nor any essential law of development guiding the process of historical change.

The extant failures of communist Marxism in part derive from a pretension to historicist objectivism. The assumption that Marxism was a science of history, the bearer of historical truth and destiny, resurrected the claims of Enlightenment reason and theology – that compact between knowledge, practice and the objective order of the cosmos. As this congealed into a programmatic dogma, the masses that Marxism claimed to be its absolute were reduced to the mere expression and servants of a communist essence inaccessible to them, rather than communism resulting from the explosive condensation of their immanent needs and transformative energy.[31] In doing so Marxism enacted a reductive displacement of the directing source of revolutionary action, from collective experience to scientific knowledge, mirroring with a tragic irony precisely that historical tendency exhibited by capitalist production. So-called revolutionary practice became mediated through an idealist epistemology of historical 'progress' correlated to the project of accumulating specialist 'scientific' knowledge coupled with institutional command and influence.

It is necessary, now as ever, to liberate communism from the dialectical schemas of necessity which would sanction its historical becoming from out of the capitalist present as a pre-ordained or organic ascent. History has been unforgiving in this respect. Revolution has been exposed, not as a form subsisting in the content which would be driven into concreteness by fate or necessity, but rather an experimental task and struggle which theoretical endeavours can support but not underwrite. If Marx reminds us that communism is not a state of affairs but a real movement, its inescapable dilemma is which concrete social forms this movement will seek to establish, which life it seeks to construct from out of the ruins of the current order.

1

Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1: the Process of Production of Capital*, (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London and New York: Penguin, 1976, p.90.

2

'The Results of the Immediate Production Process', in *Capital Vol.1,* op. cit., pp.1019–1038; Vols.30–34 of *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (esp. Vol.30, pp.54–348; Vol.33, pp.372–387; Vol.34, pp.93–121).

3

Marx, *Capital, Vol.1*, op. cit., p.645.

4

Walter Benjamin, 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"' [1940], (Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Howard Eiland), in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* Vol.4: *1938–1940*, Eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, p.402.

5

Jorge Luis Borges, 'On Exactitude in Science' in *Collected Fictions*, (Trans. Andrew Hurley), London: Penguin, 2000.

6

Antonio Negri, 'N for Negri: Antonio Negri in Conversation with Carles Guerra', (Ed. and Trans. Jorge Mestre et al.), *Grey Room,* No.11, Spring 2003, p.105; Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, (Trans. E.F.N. Jephcott), London and New York: Verso, 2005, p.229.

7

Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' [1937], in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, (Trans. Matthew J. O'connell et al), New York: Continuum, 1972.

8

Karl Marx, *MECW* Vol.34, p.30; Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', p.487.

9

'In the analysis of life phenomena, not only biological but also societal phenomena, there is no way to predetermine (mathematically) that space of possible evolutions, the "phase space" of life […] No ecosystem or economic system is in a state of equilibrium, nor approaching equilibrium, with its unique pre-given space of geodesics, unless all its "agents" are dead. Not only is life a process far removed from equilibrium, but it is permanently in "transition", at a critical threshold […] Like the economy, it is always "in crisis", that is, from our perspective, it continually changes space of possibilities and its symmetries.' Giuseppe Longo and Sara Longo, 'Infinity of God and Space of Men in Painting, Conditions of Possibility for the Scientific Revolution', in R. Scheps and M-C. Maurel (Eds.), *Mathematics in the Visual Arts,* ISTE-Wiley, 2020.

10

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781, 1787], (Trans. Paul Guyer and Allan W. Wood), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, A137/B176.

11

This is so because particularity and universality always presuppose one another. *Particularity* implies being a particular instance of some more general class that encompasses it (along with other particulars), whilst *universality* necessarily implies the encompassing of various particular instances, each with a 'specific difference'. Without particularity, that is, instantiating in a more general category, an element can only be said to be 'singular' if it is without relations which would encode its place within a systematic hierarchy.

12

All form, for Hegel, develops immanently from the contradictions subsisting within the content, emerging through the force of conceptual necessity driving his entire system. This is what, in one sense at least, makes Hegel's absolute idealism a regression from Kantian thought, because for Hegel, everything is shown to be (and indeed always has been) internal to the same self-sufficient system. There is no synthetic binding between the system and any external foundations, only a working through of apparent separations which are progressively dissolved into the total identity of all differences. This movement, much as it is in Plato, is conceived of by Hegel as the mediated *return* to an original inner unity rather than a novel synthesis of

essentially discrete elements. There are, of course, other respects in which Hegel's thought represents an advance in materialist terms over Kantian philosophy (e.g. in the insistence on deriving categories immanently from the 'matter' in which they inhere). Marx's theoretical ingenuity lay in his ability to play on the strengths of these proto-materialist impulses in order to forge a new and distinct theoretical approach, using the tools of idealism to supersede its limits as a discourse concerned solely or principally with 'thought-objects' (*Gedankenobjekten*). Cf. Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx* (PhD thesis), Kingston University 2016, Chapters 1 and 2.

13

Capital, Vol.1, op. cit., p.133 (citing Pietro Verri).

14

This new schema is that of a 'practical objectivity'. As Bolívar Echeverría elaborates, 'Whichever element of nature […] whichever section of material, of whichever materiality it may be, when it is integrated into a social process of production and consumption, of the reproduction of a social subject, constitutes that which we could call a practical object, or an object that has a socio-natural form'. Bolívar Echeverría, *La contradicción del valor y del valor de uso en El Capital de Karl Marx*, [1983], Mexico City: Itaca, 1998, p.13 (Author's translation).

15

In this way, Marx was able to counter idealism without reverting to a mechanistic and deterministic conception of natural objectivity as intentionless process. At the same time, he was able to refine and elaborate the basic notion of human praxis or 'objective activity' which distinguished his materialist outlook, grounding it in the structure of metabolic relationality characterising all organic life. Thus as Alfred Schmidt notes, 'with the concept of "metabolism," Marx introduced a completely new understanding of man's relation to nature.' *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London: NLB, 1971, pp.78–79.

16

'Every useful thing is a whole composed of many properties; it can therefore be useful in various ways. The discovery of these ways and hence of the manifold uses of things is the work of history.' *Capital, Vol.1*, op. cit., p.125.

17

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Theses on Need', (Trans. Devi Dumbadze), *Constelaciones* 6: Dec 2014, pp.464–467.

18

'The *effectiveness* of the instrumental field is not reducible to its productivity; this is only its quantitative determination – the degree to which the global instrument enables the subject to dominate or transform nature. Effectiveness is the qualitative content of productivity; it establishes an entire defined horizon of *possibilities of form* for the global object of production and consumption. In this sense, in presenting certain possibilities of form and leaving aside others, in being 'specialized' in a determinate axiological direction, the global effectiveness itself possesses a particular form, which rests upon the technological structure of the instrumental field.' Bolívar Echeverría, 'Use-value: Ontology and Semiotics' (Trans. Andrés Saenz De Sicilia and Sandro Brito Rojas), *Radical Philosophy,* No.188, November/December 2014, p.31.

19

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, (Trans. Martin Nicolaus), London and New York: Penguin, 1993, p. 96.

20

Grundrisse, op. cit., p.304.

21

'With his money, the money owner has [...] bought disposition over labour capacity so that he can use up, consume, this labour capacity as such, i.e. have it operate as actual labour, in short, so that he can have the worker really work.' Marx, *MECW* Vol.30, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988, p.64.

22

Grundrisse, op. cit., p.298.

23

Patrick Murray, 'The Social and Material Transformation of Production

by Capital: Formal and Real Subsumption in *Capital, Volume 1*', in *The Constitution of Capital: Essays on Volume I of Marx's Capital*, Eds. Riccardo Bellofiore and Nicola Taylor, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp.243-273.

24

Capital, Vol.1, op. cit., p.527.

25

Capital, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.342–3; Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Production Process', in *Capital, Vol.1*, p. 989–90.

26

Marx, *MECW*. 34, p.30.

27

Grundrisse, op. cit., p.590.

28

Yet these articulations are always multiple, developing and transforming at the level of individual production processes, sectors, regions. according to a complex combination of factors, as much political and cultural as economic. There is no overarching schema of global phases of subsumption, whereby the entire world economy would pass through distinct moments of this articulation in a uniform manner. Such totalising fantasies ignore the possible, and indeed real, combinations of multiple forms of subsumption in the same economic formations, value chains, territorial areas, etc.

29

G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (Trans. A.V. Miller), New York: Humanity Books, 1999, pp.623–650.

30

'Only in the labour process is surplus-value extracted, but all of the forms of subjugation external to production underpin the subordination of the immediate labour process. Thus, for example, cultural subjugation enables the acceptance of certain forms of rationality which are in accordance with capital. In effect, the behaviour of an illiterate worker, recently arrived from the countryside, is distinct from a worker who knows how to count and read, who is initiated in western rationalist thinking, who can use machines and who has a predictable, calculable conduct. This cultural subjugation does not enable surplus-value-extraction but it underpins the possibility of extracting it from the working class in the labour process.' Jorge Veraza, *Subsuncion Real del Consumo al Capital*, Mexico City: Itaca, 2008 (Author's translation).

31

Oscar del Barco, 'Post-scriptum', *El Otro Marx*, Sinaloa: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1983.

Arguments

Real Subsumption and the Contradiction between the Proletariat and Capital: An Historical Approach

—

Théorie Communiste

This text was commissioned in 2016. It explains TC's ideas of the periodisation of real subsumption and the implications that this has for the class struggle and what they call programmatism. TC follow critically the aftermath of '68 and the specific debates that occur in the ultra-left such as the 'refusal of work' and the 'self-negation of the proletarian'. TC's understanding of the concept of alienation is explored in the text, it concludes with the concept of revolution as communisation and a statement of the group's views on communism. Translated by Federico Corriente.

In the early 1970s, communists inherited an accumulation of experiences marked by the failure of past proletarian revolutions. At the same time, they inherited an ensemble of questions inscribed in the practices and perspectives that had constituted the soul of these revolutions and of their failure. Furthermore, within the real subsumption of labour under capital at the end of the 1960s, the 'refusal of work' and the theorisation of revolution as the 'self-negation of the proletariat' were the profound and *decisive,* but *transitory,* signs of the great transformation that the theory of communist revolution was in need of. The practices and perspectives that this great transformation called into question were those of programmatism. The historicisation of real subsumption, the definition of the nature of its dynamic and its crises, had become a necessity.

A Brief Look Backward: Formal Subsumption and Programmatism

Generally speaking, programmatism may be defined as a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which become a *programme to be realised*. In the class struggle between the proletariat and capital, the proletariat is the positive element that takes the contradiction to the point of explosion. The revolution is thus the affirmation of the proletariat, whether as a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' councils, the liberation of work, a period of transition, the withering of the state, generalised self-management, or a 'society of associated producers'. One of the terms of the contradiction is considered its solution. The proletariat is thus invested with a *revolutionary nature* that makes it contradictory to capital, and which is modulated according to more or less 'mature' historical conditions. Programmatism is not simply a theory – it is above all the practice of the proletariat, in which the rising strength of the class (from social democracy to workers' councils) is positively conceived of as a stepping-stone toward revolution and

communism. Programmatism was the practice of the proletariat from the beginning of the 19th century until the end of the 1960s. However, since programmatism is intrinsically linked to the period of formal subsumption of labour under capital, during the first phase of real subsumption, which began in the 1920s, it 'decomposed' in the specific form of *workers' identity*.

Within formal subsumption, which is based on the extraction of absolute surplus-value, capital's domination is resolved into a constraint on surplus labour, without labour having been fully specified as wage labour. Indeed, the distinction between value-creating labour and surplus-value-creating labour does not take place within the production process, but within the first moment of exchange (the purchase and sale of labour-power). In the process of production, the extraction of absolute surplus-value means that increasing the production of surplus-value necessarily entails increasing the production of value (which is no longer the case with the extraction of relative surplus-value). Moreover, in the formal subsumption of labour by capital, the labour process is not adequate to capital, i.e., it is a process in which the absorption of living labour by dead labour results from the work process itself (development of machinery); the social forces of labour (cooperation, division of labour, science) have not been objectified in fixed capital, and the reproduction of the working class has not been integrated within the specific reproduction of capital (consumption, lifestyles, social reproduction of the labour force). Capital has not integrated the collective and social reproduction of workers into its own cycle yet.

At this point, capital poses itself as an external force in its relation to labour. Thus, for the proletariat, revolution means its own liberation, its affirmation. The proletariat is therefore in a position to confront capital with what it is within it, i.e., to liberate itself from capitalist domination and to turn labour into the basis of social relations between all individuals, to make it their community, to liberate productive labour, to take control of the means of production and to free itself from the anarchy of capitalism and

private property. The proletariat's liberation is to be founded on a mode of production based upon abstract labour, i.e. upon value. This entire theoretical and practical content of the proletariat's class struggle is what we call programmatism.

Real Subsumption and Restructuring

Under the real subsumption of labour by capital, the defining feature of which is the extraction of relative surplus-value, everything which allowed the proletarian condition to be turned against capital disappears. The reproduction of labour-power loses all autonomy in relation to the reproduction of capital, labour is no longer the dominant element in the immediate process, the production process becomes adequate to the absorption of living labour by dead labour, the social unity of capitals is fixed by exchange at production prices, i.e., in such a way that the difference between variable and constant capital remains hidden – and the defence of the proletarian condition now becomes a mere moment of the presupposition of capital. Labour becomes totally specified as wage labour.

The Real Subsumption of Labour by Capital Has a History

The crisis/restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s signalled the transition to a second phase of real subsumption. We mustn't conflate absolute surplus-value and formal subsumption, relative surplus-value and real subsumption, or put them on the same level. In other words, we mustn't confuse a conceptual determination of capital and a historical configuration. Relative surplus-value is the unifying principle of the two phases of real subsumption. So, real subsumption has a history because it possesses a dynamic principle which forms it, makes it evolve, poses certain forms of the process of valorisation or circulation as fetters and transforms them. Relative surplus-value, which affects the labour process and *all social combinations of the relation between the proletariat and capital*, and consequently the relation between capitals, is what allows a continuity to be posed between the phases of real

subsumption. If we were to identify relative surplus-value with real subsumption, any transformation of real subsumption would become impossible to understand, for everything would already be there; there is, in fact, no third mode of the extraction of surplus-value. If both of them coincide, once real subsumption is historically established, then everything can only be given.

The first point, then, is not to conflate the forms of surplus-value extraction with the *historical configurations* related to the concepts of formal and real subsumption. The second point is to understand the difference in the relation between absolute surplus-value and formal subsumption on the one hand, and relative surplus-value and real subsumption on the other. It is inherent in the very notion of absolute surplus-value that its extraction can be understood only at the level of the labour process. Capital takes over an existing labour process, which it lengthens and intensifies; at the most it will content itself with regrouping the workers. The relation between the extraction of surplus-value in its relative mode and real subsumption is much more complex. We can't be satisfied with defining real subsumption only at the level of transformations of the labour process. In fact, for the introduction of machines to be synonymous with the growth of surplus-value in its relative mode, the productivity increases which this introduction causes would have to affect the goods entering into the consumption of the working class. This requires the disappearance of small-scale agriculture, and capital's hold over department II of production (means of consumption). This occurs, in its evolution, well after the introduction of machines into the labour process. But even this capitalist development of department II must not be seized upon without reservations. In fact, French and even English textile production at the beginning of the 19th century was mostly not destined for workers' consumption, but was sold on rural markets (and therefore depended on agricultural cycles), on the urban middle-class market, or for export. The extraction of relative surplus-value affects all social combinations, from the labour process to the political forms of

workers' representation, including the integration of the reproduction of labour-power in the cycle of capital, the role of the credit system, the constitution of a specifically capitalist world market (not only merchant capitalist), and the subordination of science. Real subsumption is a transformation of society and not of the labour process alone.

We can only speak of real subsumption at the very moment when all social combinations are affected. Real subsumption becomes an organic system; that is to say, it proceeds from its *own presuppositions* in order to create from itself the organs it needs and this is how it becomes a totality. Real subsumption conditions itself, whereas formal subsumption transforms and models the pre-existing social and economic fabric according to the interests and needs of capital.

This allows us to introduce a third point: the real subsumption of labour (and thus of society) under capital is by nature *always incomplete*. It is in the nature of real subsumption to reach points of rupture because real subsumption overdetermines the crises of capital as *an incomplete quality of capitalist society*. This was the case in the creation by capital of the specific organs and modalities of the absorption of the social labour-power produced by the first phase of real subsumption. Real subsumption is by nature a perpetual self-construction punctuated by crises, which resides in its basic principle, the extraction of surplus-value in its relative mode. During the crises of real subsumption, this self-construction blocks and redefines itself. The phase that began in the 1970s has now entered a specific crisis that unites over-accumulation and under-consumption crises with a crisis of the wage relationship that began with the so-called subprime crisis.

It is from relative surplus-value that we must start in order to understand how the first phase of real subsumption was thrown into crisis at the beginning of the 1970s. We might refer to this first phase in simplified form as the 'Fordist' or 'Keynesian' phase, of the division of the world between capitalism and 'really existing socialism' and of the clear distinction between centre and periphery.

In this restructuring, the contradiction which the old cycle of struggles had thrown up was abolished and superseded, i.e. the contradiction between, on the one hand, a workforce created, reproduced and put to work by capital in a collective and social manner, and, on the other, the forms of appropriation of this workforce by capital, whether in the immediate production process (the assembly line, the 'big factory' system), in the process of its reproduction (welfare) or in the relation between capitals (national areas of capital distribution). This was the conflictive situation which, within the cycle of struggles that came to an end during the 1970s and which was abolished by the restructuring, manifested itself as *a workers' identity confirmed in the very reproduction of capital*. This was how the integration of the reproduction of labour-power, the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital, and the increase of relative surplus-value in the immediate production process (which had become an obstacle to valorisation on the basis of relative surplus-value) were respectively structured.

Therefore, it is a matter of locating this internal contradiction of the first phase of real domination in regard to relative surplus-value, and therefore of analysing how the axes of restructuring are set up on the basis of relative surplus-value as a dynamic principle. Thus one confers signification and meaning on these axes, i.e., their necessity in relation to what exploitation and capital are.

From this point of view, the axes which brought about the fall in the rate of profit during the previous phase offer us a vision of the elements which capital had to abolish, transform, or supersede during the restructuring. However, at this level, the approach remains empirical insofar as, in itself, a list of what is to be superseded does not constitute the common principle of supersession, the law of transformation, its hierarchisation and conceptual structure. Nonetheless, we can already gather all of this into two major aspects, which cover the specificity of relative surplus-value in relation to absolute surplus-value: the immediate

process of production and the social combinations (reproduction of labour-power, relationship between departments and capital, accumulation zones).

Regarding the first point, we must deal with all the features of the immediate production process (assembly-line work, cooperation, production-maintenance, the collective worker, the continuity of the production process, sub-contracting, segmentation of the workforce) and with all the separations (work, unemployment, training) that constituted a working class identity and conferred the production of surplus-value as the content of the contradiction between classes – and on the foundation of which managerial and hegemonic control over society as a whole (as opposed to this production as immediately adequate to the reproduction of the social relation it produces) was exercised. This working class identity was inherent to a contradiction in which the proletariat constituted itself as an autonomous force confronting capital in the latter's overall reproduction. Secondly, we must deal with the forms of circulation and accumulation. As far as the former is concerned, it could be argued that, in addition to altering the relations between production and the market, just-in-time production has transformed the immediate production process and all the activities linked to it regarding their relations with the product's entry into circulation. As for the latter, the transformations concern national accumulation, the differentiation between centre and periphery, the division of the globe into two accumulation zones, and the dematerialisation of money. In both cases, the forms and contents of accumulation that contributed to the constitution of a working class identity disappear.

If we return to relative surplus-value as a principle of development and mutation of real subsumption in relation to these two points, which unite what immediately appeared to be impediments to the pursuit of accumulation, and we ask ourselves how these elements could specifically and qualitatively hinder the growth of relative surplus-value, we come face to face with the basic synthetic principle of the restructuring.

The restructuring was the destruction of everything that might become an impediment to the fluidity[1] of the *double moulinet*[2] of capital's self-presupposition. These impediments were, on the one hand, all the separations, protections and specifications that had been erected to stave off the decline in the value of labour-power, insofar as they prevented the working class as a whole, in the continuity of its existence, of its reproduction and expansion, from having to face the entirety of capital as such: that is the first *moulinet*, the reproduction of labour-power. On the other hand, they were all the constraints of circulation, turnover, and accumulation, which hindered the transformation of the surplus product into surplus-value and additional capital. Any surplus product must be able to find its market anywhere, any surplus-value must be able to find the possibility of operating as additional capital anywhere, i.e. of being transformed into means of production and labour-power, without any formalisation of the international cycle (such as the division into blocs, East and West, or into centre and periphery) predetermining this transformation. The fluidity of each of these *moulinets* is set in motion only in and by the fluidity of the other. Financial capital became the adequate form of shaping the mode of production in regard to both of these aspects.

The exploitation which constitutes the content of this relation can be broken down into three moments: the purchase and sale of labour-power, the subsumption of labour by capital, and the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital, i.e., into new means of labour and modified labour-power. Restructuring renders both circuits of the *moulinet* adequate to the production of relative surplus-value while at the same time, the immediate production process, their junction, transmits its energy and the necessity of its metamorphosis to each of them. It is in this sense that the production of surplus-value and the reproduction of the conditions of this production coincide. This is how the integration of the reproduction of labour-power, the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital, and the increase in relative surplus-value within the immediate production process (which had become obstacles to

valorisation on the basis of relative surplus-value), were respectively structured, i.e., finally, the way in which capital, as an organic system, *constituted itself as a society*.

This non-coincidence between production and reproduction (which emerged as such during the crisis of the late 1960s/early 1970s) was the basis of the formation and confirmation of a *workers' identity* within the reproduction of capital. This workers' identity allowed for a hiatus between the production of surplus-value and the reproduction of the social relation, a hiatus which enabled the rivalry between two hegemonies, two forms of management, two forms of control of reproduction. The history of the capitalist mode of production is constantly, and essentially, the history of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. During the revolutionary wave that followed World War I, the transition of the mode of production to real subsumption established its own historical determinations and carried its 'stigmata' as the specification of the working class and the confirmation of workers' identity in its own reproduction right up to the splits that began with the Cold War.

Consistency between relative surplus-value and its three defining determinations (labour process, integration of the reproduction of labour-power, relations between capitals on the basis of their distribution) demands that production and reproduction coincide, and consequently, that the constitution and reproduction of the proletariat as a class coalesces both with the determinations of capital and with its own contradiction with capital. This thus becomes a contradiction with itself, which is the simplest definition one can give of the cycle of struggles that began in the 1970s.

It is clear that the transition from one phase of real subsumption to another cannot have the same scope as the transition from formal to real subsumption, but we cannot be satisfied with the mere positing of a continuity between the two phases of real subsumption. Change would then be the mere elimination of archaisms; transformation would then ultimately be merely formal, and would fundamentally alter nothing in the contradiction between

proletariat and capital. Even the very notion of a crisis between the two phases would disappear. We wouldn't be passing from one particular configuration of the contradiction to another, and the notion of restructuring would disappear by the same count.

During the 1970s all these modifications constituted a system by eliminating working class identity and defining the contradiction between classes at the level of their reproduction. And that's why these changes are a restructuring: because they articulate a counter-revolution.

There is no restructuring of the capitalist mode of production without a working class defeat. This defeat was the defeat of workers' identity, of the communist parties, of unionism, of self-management, self-organisation, and the refusal of work. What was defeated was an entire cycle of struggle, *in all its aspects*. Restructuring is essentially counter-revolution, and counter-revolution isn't always measured by a death toll.

In order to understand the persistence of programmatism in real subsumption we must take the conditions of the production of workers' identity during the first phase of real subsumption into account. The programmatic revolutionary process of the working class' affirmation is twofold. It is represented by the *rising power of the class* within the capitalist mode of production on the one hand, and by its affirmation as a particular class (and thus by the preservation of its *autonomy*) on the other.

The transition of capital to the real subsumption of labour (towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th) disrupted the classical programmatic relation between the rising power of the class and its autonomous affirmation. Each of these terms contradicted the other. Initially, between 1917 and 1939, both terms were reciprocally implicated and in a situation of violent conflict at the same time. Indeed, at the very moment in which the autonomous affirmation of the class acquires *absolute* legitimacy in its rising power within capital such as it is included within it, it cannot within but confront this rising power, which is the negation of its autonomy. Between 1917 and 1939,

the violence of this process for the proletariat, in its contradiction with capital, gave way, after 1945, to a period in which autonomous affirmation recognised itself and considered itself exterior to and distinct from the rising power of the class, which had become mere rivalry (most often within the framework of the demand for democracy) in the reproduction of capital, even if it was forced to constantly point to this rising power. This was the period of the 'marginalisation of the revolutionaries'.

We may understand how, on the basis of a few summary ideas regarding the period of '68, at the end of this cycle of struggles the *critique-refusal of work* and its corollary, the *self-negation of the proletariat*, imposed themselves as the extreme point of the cycle, as its 'superseding', when in fact they merely took it to its completion.

The Period of '68

The late 1960s and early 1970s were the period of the first crisis and the first revolutionary movement that unveiled the contradictions and the history of the real subsumption of labour under capital. But due to the characteristics of this first phase of real subsumption – that the restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s put an end to – we can *now* say that the specific issues concerning revolution under the real subsumption of labour by capital were not posed in practical terms until the workers' movement and everything founded on a workers' identity that might still pave the way to the establishment of the proletariat as a ruling class was *annihilated*. What was glimpsed was that communism was not a mode of production, and that the abolition of capital could only be the negation of classes and of the proletariat itself in the production of what was called, at the time, 'the human community'. The essential critical content of May 1968 and of that entire period was to practically come up against the fact that revolution was neither a matter of management nor of the proletariat becoming a ruling class which generalises its situation, universalises work as a social relation and the economy as the objectivity of society as a relation between things.

In the course of this crisis, the critique of every mediation of the proletariat's existence in the capitalist mode of production – (mass party, union, parliamentarism), of organisational forms such as the party or the vanguard, of ideologies such as Leninism, of practices such as militancy and all its variants – seemed to become pointless if what was at stake was not the revolution as an affirmation of the proletariat. Whether in the form of a socialist state or the generalisation of workers' councils, *it was struggle as a class which had become the problem*, i.e., its own limit.

In France, the workers fled the factories occupied by the unions, and the youngest among them, as well as others, joined the student struggle. May 1968 was the critique in acts and often 'with the feet' of the revolution as the rising strength and affirmation of the class. The workers only entered the factories at the moment of the return to work, often to oppose themselves violently to it. In 'The Story of Our Origins', the editors of *La Banquise* (No.2, 1983, p.26) rightly remark: 'Bizarrely, at a time when people spoke so much of management, one saw that the workers *disassociated themselves from all strike administration*. Abandoning control of the factories to the trade unions was a sign of weakness, but also of the fact that they were conscious that the problem lay elsewhere.' (our emphasis).

In Italy, a powerful autonomous affirmation of the class came to the fore, but it didn't know what to do with itself. When Giachetti and Scavino titled their book on the struggles in Turin *'La FIAT in mani agli operai*[3]*'* (our emphasis), unlike in the case of the factory committees of 1920, *workers no longer had anything to do with it*. The refusal of work of the 1960s or early 1970s is not the same as that of the 1990s or 2000s. The former led to industrial action or to separation from the working class condition, while the latter attacks everything that defines this condition as *an attack on what one is*. The Italian movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was deeper, longer, and broader, but it remained within the well-known framework of the conflicts

linked to the 'mass worker' – radically so, but nonetheless within it. In France, we had to deal with something harder to identify.

What was becoming evident was that the revolution was no longer the culmination of the class' rising power within the capitalist mode of production, which was to reach its apex in its affirmation as the ruling class, in the power of the workers' councils or the socialist state. 'May '68' did not remain within this negation because the real subsumption of labour by capital had subjected the entirety of social reproduction, all aspects of life, to capital.

The revolution could no longer be confined to changing the owners of the factories, nor even limit itself to the production process. In encompassing the whole of everyday life, the revolution was the negation of the proletarian condition and could only be such on that condition. This is how, in the history of the class struggle, the May Movement posed the need to abolish the proletariat, despite the fact that it did so *only in this fashion*.

The workers' revolt against the condition of the working class, a revolt against every aspect of life, found itself trapped in a predicament. It could only express itself and become effective by turning against its own foundations, the condition of the working class, but not in order to suppress these foundations, *for it was unable to find in itself the relation to capital which might have constituted that suppression*, but in order to *separate* itself from them. On the one hand we had a strong workers' movement with solid roots, the confirmation by capital of a workers' identity, a recognised strength of the class coupled with the radical impossibility of turning this strength into an autonomous force and a revolutionary affirmation of the class of labour; on the other, this impossibility translated *positively* to the propagation of revolt to the entirety of social reproduction, a revolt through which the proletariat negated itself.

Throughout this entire period, programmatism and its critique were interwoven. Under real subsumption, the content of the proletariat's struggle in its contradiction with capital can only be its own affirmation and the emancipation of labour

insofar as this contradiction entails the production and reproduction of a working class identity produced and confirmed as part of capital's reproduction. The cause of its failure lay in its very condition of existence.

The revolution could only be the negation of the working class condition, but it was necessary to seek this negation, not in the relation of the proletariat with capital but in the universality of alienation. This *universal* – and to this extent *human* – alienation was justified by the protest against the established way of life, of consumption, of 'capitalist prosperity'. This revolt against the working class condition, which extended beyond the labour process, produced its *raison d'être* beyond itself. As the universality of alienation, this revolt became autonomous from its real conditions; it appeared to originate not directly from the situation of the worker, but to be society's overall truth, the 'universal human alienation' which the worker merely recapitulated and condensed (Marcuse and the theorists of the 'Frankfurt School' became fashionable). The revolt became detached from and alien to itself, and split into a working class revolt stuck in a deadlock and the autonomous and mysterious form which that very same revolt had adopted in regard to itself: a revolt against all aspects of life, that brought the worker to the forefront and set them in motion as a *universal* and therefore *human* being. If this revolt against the 'totality of life' was perceived as a 'human revolt', it was because at the time the proletariat was considered unable of arriving, on the foundation of its very class situation, to anything other than to its affirmation and in the best of cases, to the impossibility of this affirmation. The movement remained programmatic even within its questioning.

The 'refusal of work' and 'the self-negation of the proletariat' were the final ideological denominations of these limits.

Refusal of Work and Self-negation: Transitional Concepts

Although they mark the ideological limits of this period's struggles, the concepts of the 'refusal of work' and the 'self-negation

of the proletariat' are also transitional concepts between two cycles of struggle: that of workers' identity, which was coming to its end, and that of class action as the limit of the class struggle, which was just beginning. The critique we are going to put forth here concerns neither the reality of the facts themselves or their importance as forms of working class struggle in the United States and in all the developed countries of Europe, but *their construal into an ideology of the 'refusal of work',* which while not abandoning the standpoint of the old cycle of struggles (self-organisation, workers' affirmation, i.e., the flipside of the confirmation of a working class identity within the reproduction of capital...) attempted to offer a way out from its fundamental practical and theoretical impasse: the revolution as an affirmation of the working class or the proletariat.

In France, the theoretical debate began with the publication of Bill Watson's text 'Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor' (published in French by *Informations et Correspondances Ouvrières (ICO)*, No.115–116, March–April 1972) and bounced back and forth with John Zerzan's text 'Organized Labour versus "The Revolt Against Work"'.[4] In his text, Zerzan highlighted new developments in working class struggles in the United States, which were new due both to their mass character and to the significance that they were taking on in this phase of capitalist development. These new forms of struggle expressed themselves most often in the form of absenteeism, sabotage, employee turnover, voluntary unemployment, and so on.

These forms of struggle signalled the apex of the old cycle, in the sense that through these struggles the working class turned the very characteristics of its defeat at the beginning of the century against capital (as the Italian workerists said): its integration within the reproduction of capital, the transformation of the labour process into a production process adequate to capital, the total definition of labour as wage labour, and so on. Sabotage, absenteeism, etc., are meaningless in themselves when extracted from the period of struggle and the stage of development of

capital in which they take place: the early 19th century English weaver is not the 1970s American General Motors worker. During the early 1970s, instead of understanding that these struggles were simultaneously the high point of the old cycle and, in their very forms, the expression of the obsolescence of the period of struggle inaugurated in the immediate aftermath of the World War I, the ideology of the 'refusal of work' attempted to integrate them into the old cycle's standpoint and to see in them, at last, the foundations of its possible 'success'. Turning the refusal of work into the royal road to working-class autonomy was a very unstable ideology, and it did not last long. There was also a more radical expression of this ideology that we will deal with further on.

Even before revealing the real and massive nature of the facts on which he was basing himself, Zerzan hastened to frame them within the perspective of the working class affirming itself, taking its destiny into its own hands and seizing control of the means of production:

> Turning to more direct forms of opposition to an uncontrolled and alien job world, we encounter the intriguing experience of Bill Watson, who spent 1968 in an auto plant near Detroit. Distinctly post-union in practice, he witnessed the systematic, planned efforts of the workers to substitute their own production plans and methods for those of management. He described it as 'a regular phenomenon' brought out by the refusal of management and the UAW to listen to workers' suggestions as to modifications and improvements in the product.[5]

A unique conception of the 'refusal of work' and of the working class condition indeed, which he then turns into the text's conclusion:

> But it remains doubtful that token participation will assuage the worker's alienation. More likely, it will underline it and

> make even clearer the true nature of the union-management relationship, which will still obtain. It may be more probable that traditional union institutions, such as the paid, professional stratum of officials and representatives, monopoly of membership guaranteed by management, and the labour contract itself will be increasingly re-examined as *workers continue to strive to take their work lives into their own hands.* (our emphasis).[6]

These struggles marked the apex and the obsolescence of the old cycle. They marked its apex in that what the class turned against capital was the cycle's very foundation; its obsolescence in that these struggles spelled the inevitable historical futility of separating the wage labourer, the proletarian, from the producer, the futility of conceiving the revolution as the takeover by the workers of all that defines them as workers: the enterprise, the division of labour, exchange, the labour process. In this instance, 'the refusal of work', i.e., *the ideological construal of real practices*, is not a refusal of the working-class condition, since the crux of the matter is that the workers seize control of their conditions of existence, but a refusal of its *institutionalisation*, as if the two could be separated. A working class without capital is no more imaginable than a working class without institutional forms, and for the same reason.

The 'refusal of work' appeared as the form finally arrived at with which to separate the affirmation of labour from that which sticks to it like glue in the real subsumption of labour under capital: all the forms of its institutionalisation. The old problem of this cycle of struggles, which for half a century had constituted the substance of councillism and the ultra-left – and of all those that wished to place themselves 'to the left of the Communist parties' – seemed solved. Even so, only the currents originating in the ultra-left and councillism were capable of taking the problem far enough to perceive the importance of the refusal of work, despite remaining bogged down in their basic conception. Indeed, any practice, organisation, or theory that posits the revolution as

the affirmation of the proletariat, while considering this affirmation as the critique and negation of everything that defines the proletariat's implication with capital may be labelled ultra-left. In this regard, the entire history of the ultra-left is a contradiction in process. The refusal of work – not the practices in question, but the ideology infusing these practices with its own meaning – presented itself as the solution finally arrived at to this contradiction.

Therefore, Zerzan could drive the 'nearly unanimous contempt for work' home without contradicting himself.[7] What he was clinging to (and to him this is what mattered) was the separation of the affirmation of the working class from all its institutional forms and, above all, from the trade unions. Having finally found in the 'refusal of work' a mode of struggle which has to break with the institutionalised forms of the reciprocal implication between the proletariat and capital, with which the former had been confused, the class will finally be able affirm itself by a complete break with what binds it to capital. *The ultra-left realises and suppresses itself.*

The 'refusal of work' performs the feat of uniting the break with all the mediations of the reciprocal implication between the proletariat and capital *with* the working class's will to 'control its conditions of existence'. In the refusal of work, 'the class struggle is stronger and more vivid, but more elusive according to traditional criteria' (Henri Simon, afterword to Zerzan's text). This 'more vivid' but 'more elusive' class struggle, is the break, as the very form of the struggle itself, with all the mediations of the class affirmation. Thus this ideology construes all the determinations necessary for it to become, for itself, the finally possible affirmation of the working class and of labour. The ideology of the 'refusal of work' emerges triumphant from the tour de force – if we are to take its name into consideration – of presenting itself finally as the last [*enfin*] possible affirmation of labour against capital.

In France, some people, such as Charles Reeve, saw the danger implicit in this way out of the ultra-left's contradictions:

> When someone says, as John Zerzan does, that in their present struggles workers exhibit a tendency to take control of the forces of production, it's hard to see how the 'revolt against work' and sabotage can be 'critical' forms of the modern revolutionary struggle! In fact, these new tendencies *to re-appropriate power over the productive apparatus* can only arise from collective struggle.[8]

In a nutshell, what Reeve was saying to his opponents was: 'You are sawing the branch on which both you and I are seated'. From Zerzan to Reeve the goal was identical: the seizing of the productive apparatus by the workers. For Reeve, the crux of the matter was to always advocate revolution as a reorganisation of production, as putting society as a whole to work, as the generalisation of the proletarian condition, *as if nothing had happened*. The spitefulness of his critique was rooted in his hatred of those reckless idiots who – theoretically speaking – had inadvertently opened Pandora's box by looking to the 'refusal of work' as the solution to the impasses of programmatism.

The Refusal of Work: Towards the Overcoming of Programmatism

As the final ideology of the old cycle of struggles, the ideology of the 'refusal of work' was also a transitional ideology between two cycles of struggle. Indeed, although the 'refusal of work' is linked to the standpoint of the old cycle, it cannot remain within the standpoint of the working class affirming itself and taking control of its means of existence.

In *ICO* No.118 (June 1972), an unsigned text (written by one of the future founders of *Négation*) had already presented a systematic critique of the managerial conception of the refusal of work, i.e., a critique of its fundamental inconsistency. This text, 'Contre-interprétation du "Contre-planning dans l'atelier"', was a reply to Watson's article ('Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor'),

on which Zerzan, shortly thereafter, had largely founded his 'paradoxical' analysis of the refusal of work.[9]

This was a theoretically seminal critique. It laid the groundwork for the analysis of the 'refusal of work' as the practical foundation for the theory of the self-negation of the proletariat:

> This sacred character of work among the councilists is based on the belief (within an extremely harsh life) that on the one side we would have the labour of the producers of social wealth and on the other, surplus-value and the labour which produces commodities and therefore capitalist wealth. […] The existence of each enterprise is in line with the internal requirements of this mode of production (valorisation-competition) and cannot survive its destruction. Self-managing enterprises amounts to self-managing capitalist production and good intentions to do otherwise change nothing in that regard. […]. The consciousness of the producer (of social wealth) has been replaced by the consciousness of the proletariat (producer of surplus-value) and the content of struggles, beyond the similarities between their causes, has been transformed: they have evolved from being managerial and *positive*, to become increasingly destructive and purely *negative*, which is what explains their lack of perspectives beyond the space-time of a strike, for their only logical outcome would be the self-suppression of the proletariat, and hence the destruction of capital.[10]

The critique emphasised the deep kinship extant between leftist Leninism and self-managing councillism: 'Both exalt the proletariat *as such*, and urge it to wrest power from the hands of the bourgeoisie. For the former, the crux of the matter lies in political power; for the latter, it lies in economic power; the fact is, however, that beyond their false ideological oppositions, they are indissolubly linked.'[11] And the text concluded: 'The

self-negation of the proletariat is the exact opposite of the negation of the human race… .'

For his part, Peter Rachleff, in taking up Zerzan's defence in the course of the polemic with Reeve, (in *Fifth Estate*, February 1977) actually destroyed his entire interpretation and released the 'refusal to work' from the class affirmation standpoint in which Zerzan had confined it:

> It is here that Reeve is trapped by outdated notions. For these collective struggles cannot grow out of the suppression of 'privatistic' personal desires, the subjection of the individual to the collectivity, but are the product of a new fusion of individual and collective needs and desires – the self-abolition of the proletariat. The struggle against work is both individual and collective – and these two aspects of it mutually reinforce each other. The individual's refusal to be a wage-labourer is wedded to the proletariat's struggle to free itself from the constraints of its social position. In order to see this through, we must break with the traditional notions of the class struggle which posit its goal as the dictatorship of the proletariat. This whole conception is erroneous. The goal of contemporary class struggles, the results they prefigure, is the abolition of the proletariat, the destruction of capital in all its aspects. […] Today it is no longer desirable, even imaginable, to seize control of the productive apparatus as it exists and to manage it in our own interests: Capital has sunk its tentacles into the very nature of work itself.[12]

In the positions defended by Rachleff, the concept of the 'self-negation of the proletariat' – already operating in France in journals such as *Négation* (see elsewhere in this book) or *Intervention Communiste* – was beginning to take shape. Based on the refusal of work, this concept completes the former and lends it all its coherence.

The self-negation of the proletariat announces the impossibility of a continuous process leading from the defence of the proletarian condition to the revolution. In the face of this situation, in which the defence of the condition of the working class was no longer the revolution's antechamber, it had become suitable to oppose the class situation that defined the proletariat within the capitalist mode of production to its true revolutionary nature – which could only exist and appear via a break with its existence and its class action specific to the mode of production – a true nature concealed, as it were, by its class reproduction. All the more so because, should that be the case, the only possible link that could exist between the immediate practice of the class in the capitalist mode of production and the revolution resided in all those practices that might express this break with the integration of its defence and its reproduction: the conquest of its autonomy. The *self-negation of the proletariat* thus became the apex and the theoretical corollary *of autonomy, of self-organisation*. The proletariat could only be revolutionary by opposing everything that articulated it as a class of the capitalist mode of production. The 'refusal of work', riots, looting, and strikes without demands naturally became the activity par excellence on the basis of which self-negation could take place.

However, very soon the 'solution' summarised in the formula *self-negation of the proletariat* was itself *thrown into crisis*. Indeed, although the revolt against work signals the end of the affirmation of the proletariat, in itself it is not the production of a revolutionary situation. Proletarians who sabotage express their rage against the intensification of exploitation, and are well aware that none of the vitality lost in the production of commodities can be regained in their consumption. Their revolt, however, did not herald the impending destruction of capital, for it was inscribed in the exhaustion of a regime of exploitation – and therefore of accumulation, which had generalised itself from the United States to the rest of the world by way of the bloody restructuring of World War II.

On the one hand, from the end of the 1970s onward, given that the link between immediate struggles and the revolution had been lost, a solution of continuity between the two had to be found; the toughest struggles, such as those that took place in the French iron and steel industries, although they sometimes clashed with the unions, were nonetheless merely demanding job protection; on the other hand, all the struggles linked to the refusal of work – in which programmatism had seen the solution to its impasses – had disappeared. The self-negation of the proletariat could no longer present itself as the natural consequence of the impossibility of the proletariat affirming itself or as the affirmation of an element developing within the capitalist mode of production and calling it into question, as was '*lavoro sociale*' for the Italian workerists. It was no longer possible to fathom and give meaning to immediate practices (the late 1970s were the time when self-organisation declined and became defensive and of the beginning of the second phase of Autonomia).

In this critical phase of the end of the old cycle of struggles, in which the restructuring of capital was both *necessary* and *diluted and postponed/put off*, the self-negation of the proletariat was both an *inevitable* and an *impossible* concept. Although it lent meaning to the refusal of work and completed the liquidation of the workers' program, it did not solve the problem of communisation. Quite the opposite, it transposed it to a speculative level that made it completely insoluble. At this level, any analytical refinements notwithstanding, the capital/proletariat contradiction turns the proletariat into the subject and the object of the revolution, which now becomes an intervention of the proletariat on itself.

This concept of self-negation is merely negative: the immediate expression of the *impossibility* of the affirmation of labour. In order to produce revolution and communism, the constitution of a *theoretical humanism*, that is, of a human essence of the proletariat distinguished from its strictly contradictory relationship to capital, furnished this concept with its own content and positivity. But now, beneath the proletarian, the revolutionary

subject became Man, with his needs, his desires, and his sociality as a species-being. The 'traditional conception' had come to an end in a coherent fashion. Its impasse became obvious, but it had not been superseded. Should we stick to the class struggle, we no longer stick to the revolution; should we stick to the revolution, we no longer adhere to the class struggle. The revolution is still the process of an affirmation, that of the proletariat's human nature. This concept of the self-negation of the proletariat, linked to the 'critique of work', was to be burdened with the task of overcoming the 'traditional conception', but it itself was, in a way, a concept on half-pay: linked to a previous standpoint, it was demanded of it that it formulate a new concept. Consequently, this new standpoint was nothing but a solution to old problems.

The *self-negation of the proletariat* turned the contradiction between the proletariat and capital into the contradictory essence of the proletariat: the latter abolishes itself and *thus* abolishes capital. The proletariat is both labour and its subsumption under capital, both living labour and dead labour. The contradiction between the proletariat and capital is transposed into an 'essence of the proletariat'. At first sight, it would seem that capital has disappeared, but in fact what has actually disappeared is the proletariat. Beneath its name, we merely rediscover the contradictory development of the capitalist mode of production. The process of exploitation has become the essence of one of its terms, the proletariat, which thus becomes a conceptual monster. In itself, in its existence, it represents the very impossibility of this existence; it represents the impossibility of its existence as a class, but at the same time it represents the synthesis, the totality of the mode of production. The revolution becomes the result of an internal contradiction of the proletariat, its revolutionary element, humanity, which is precisely what is concealed by its definition as a class in reciprocal implication with capital. Thus self-negation and the refusal of work became a theoretical humanism. The proletariat, then, is nothing but the name given to the contradictory course of capital's economic categories, which turn into the manifestations

of a transcendental subject – man as a species-being – which never coincides with the actual reality of anything it does.

To Be Done With the 'Critique of Work'

The absolute limit of every 'critique of work' lies in the fact that it ascribes to activity, as its essence, what is a matter of social relations. It turns the social relations in which work takes place into the essence of this activity, and turns social relations into the *expression* of this essence. First an abstraction (work) is extracted from social relations, and then these same social relations are explained as being founded on this abstraction.

That's why the great theoretical reference of the 'critique of labour' is the Feuerbachian production of 'alienated labour' developed by Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*. On the model of religion, the foundation of the concept of 'alienated labour' is that the object produced by the worker is the objectification of man's essence, which has become alien to him. There is no concept of 'alienated labour' unless we assume the existence of an essence of man as a species-being that is lost and subsequently found, i.e., which is only lost in order to be found anew. In this perspective, 'alienated labour' – as a manifestation of man turning against himself – becomes the origin of social relations which are merely a historical form that is preparing the supersession of labour.

In the *1844 Manuscripts*, 'alienated labour' is the foundation and mainstay of all relations between individuals as they exist in society. The first and founding movement is the self-alienation of man in relation to himself, and everything else follows: the worker, alienated labour (which makes the 'materialisation' of Feuerbach's self-alienation possible), private property, etc. Every social category and relation of production which 'express[es]' alienated labour 'in its reality'[13] are themselves, as a formalisation of social relations, a mere manifestation of man's self-alienation, the first principle, the 'rational foundation' of the categories of political economy.

Two consequences result from this: the inability to make history a reality and its corollary, the teleological question par excellence which plagues every 'critique of labour' and runs through the entire text of the *1844 Manuscripts*: 'How, we now ask, does man come to alienate, to estrange, his labour? *How is this estrangement rooted in the nature of human development?* (our emphasis). For when one speaks of *private property,* one thinks of dealing with something external to man. When one speaks of labour, one is directly dealing with man himself. This new formulation of the question already contains its solution.'[14] This solution must be so 'obvious' that Marx never formulates it except in the following form: 'Labour is man's coming-to-be for himself within alienation'. This proposition is not explicitly formulated as an answer to The Question, for it is quite evident that it implies another: why does man 'come-to-be in alienation?' The abolition of work's 'critique of labour' is trapped within speculative thought. Despite the fact that in the *Grundrisse*, the *Unpublished Chapter,* and *Capital*, Marx continues speaking of the alienation of labour, the alienation of labour is itself explained by the relations of production; it describes a situation, it exists within capital's production relations. It is no longer the origin unfolding and giving rise to all else. It no longer revolves around the essence of man, but around historically determined social relations in which the worker is separated entirely or partly from his working conditions, the product of his activity and his activity itself. The perspective has been reversed: the teleology of alienation has been left behind.

The communist revolution is the abolition of labour, but it is not based on the abolition of labour; communist theory speaks of the abolition of labour on the foundation of the capitalist mode of production's internal contradictions, on the foundation of exploitation. It is not a 'critique of work'.

If one produces a concept of *work* which differs from that of *wage labour*, given its definition, then it must deal with something other than wage labour or even the sum of the historical

forms of labour. It must be an abstraction from wage labour that explains the necessity of wage labour and the other historical forms of labour, and it must tell us why the abolition of wage labour is the abolition of work. As a concept, work is a useful abstraction only if we distinguish it from wage labour, and we do not distinguish it from wage labour by proclaiming any characteristic common to all forms of labour, but only to the extent that it tells us that *there can be no higher form of labour beyond wage labour*. In other words, this concept must substantiate the necessity of its historical forms and it must simultaneously substantiate why wage labour is the contradiction of labour with itself. In its own way, i.e., as exploitation and contradiction between classes, the capitalist mode of production nullifies the distinction between social and individual activity.

Besides that, this abstraction would seek to distinguish itself from wage labour only by offering us one of its characteristics as its definition. We would then have to say either that labour is an activity separate from all the other activities which constitute human activity, or that it is an 'activity to order', i.e., that within it execution is separated from consciousness, or that it is production devoid of any regard for human needs, or that it separates those activities in which man takes 'external nature'as his object from those other activities within which this object is 'his own'. What counts in this type of definition of work is to satisfy ourselves with finding a common trait between all the historical forms of labour and to say that, since this trait can be found again in wage labour, the abolition of wage labour is the abolition of work. All of which is tautological, but alas, tautology is inherent to the 'critique of work'.

In all these definitions, a single feature of *wage labour* is more or less arbitrarily chosen as a definition of *work*. It is necessary to go further and consider that wage labour itself imposes its internal distinction from work, and that its mere critique as such is structurally inadequate.

Given the transformations of the labour process under real subsumption, the appropriation of living labour results from the production process itself, and opposition to exploitation and alienation becomes the worker's refusal of his immediate activity in the production process. The worker's own activity directly confronts him and it no longer does so merely in the sense that it is materialised in a product which belongs to capital. It thus seems totally inadequate to criticise wage labour, because now it is in the *second* moment (labour's transformation into capital in the immediate production process) of exchange between labour and capital when labour-power's use-value, living labour, confronts the worker as the activity of someone else, the capitalist, and not just because the latter has become its owner, but via the transformation of the labour process itself into a capitalist process. The first alienation of the sale of labour-power is supplemented by *a second one*, which is not merely due to the fact that labour-power has been sold and consequently used in a way which is foreign and antagonistic to the worker in whom it nonetheless continues to be embodied, but which is *specific* to the performance of the activity itself. Thus the two moments of the exchange between labour and capital, the connection of which specifically constitutes wage labour, become separate: on the one hand, the purchase and sale of labour-power that is the foundation of *wage labour*, and on the other, the domination of the activity thus sold, which is the foundation of *work*. The sale of labour-power thus seems inadequate to account for what now takes place in the production process.

The total specification of work as wage labour by capital paradoxically allows us to distinguish it from wage labour, but no longer, as in formal subsumption, as something that could be liberated in the form of the worker's activity as a subject, but rather as something directly confronting him. Here we touch upon the difference between the struggles against the introduction of 'scientific management' in the beginning of the 20th century and the struggles around the 'refusal of work' in the late 1960s/early 1970s.

Under real subsumption, wage labour entails this distinction in itself between the worker's activity *appearing* to be *work* and the social forms of its performance *presenting* it as *wage labour*. The distinction internal to wage labour under real subsumption between the activity of the worker presenting itself as 'work' and the social forms of its performance *appearing* as its historical specificity as wage labour is *presented* as a duality between 'work' and 'wage labour'.

However, within this very 'critique of work', which has not left wage labour behind, we see the emergence of a concept of work which truly differs from the wage labour on which this 'critique of work' is indeed founded. The 'critique of work' styles itself as such without going beyond the critique of wage labour, but whenever it comes to defining its 'supersession of work', we see at play another, implicit definition of work, which the 'critique of work'cannot produce without negating itself. Indeed, it sets out from work in order to tackle social relations, seeking to overcome capitalist social relations, not within and according to their own characteristics, but only insofar as they are the manifestation of this activity: work. Such is the vicious circle of the 'critique of work': in order to justify the process of its production as an abstraction, work is defined as a social relation which must precede all social relations.

Perceived and experienced within the class struggle, as the overcoming of what has been defined as 'work' *within* wage labour and as *economy*, as the objectivity of the capitalist social relation, the concept of work thus refers to the fact that the production of relations among individuals is subject to (mediated by) man's activity as an objective being, which then goes from mediating between individual and social activity, the historical non-coincidence of which *does not have to be produced*, to dominating the relation. It is this activity of man as an objective being, as mediation between individual and social activity, which may be defined as *work* when considered as an *abstraction* distinct from its particular historical forms. This is what the critique of work

cannot produce, because the social relation which produces work is already contained in work itself. The great danger is to perform the 'speculative leap' which turns the concept as a *concretion of thought* into the concept as the dynamic of history itself, as that which would allow history to exist. *History never has to be produced*, it is always present, along with the clear-cut dividing line between concept and reality, the boundary of materialism. The theme of communist theory is not to explain why alienation has existed, but why it cannot go on existing.

Regardless of how one may define work, whether as a mere aspect of wage labour or as a true abstraction, a formidable obstacle is to be found in the definition of work as an 'eternal' activity, independent of every social form under which it is performed. This definition of work recurs in Marx, so we will choose the one included in *Volume 1* of *Capital*:

> Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.[15]

And on page 186, this work is defined as activity:

> therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.'[16]

This eternal labour is thus defined as the transformation of nature and of man himself, and defines the concrete world as 'human activity' (*Theses on Feuerbach*). But is this 'eternal labour' really all that independent from any social form? In the capitalist mode of production, work acquires a general and abstract content (abstract labour as the substance of value) as its specific historical content. It is this specific, historical form which, under certain conditions of the class struggle, is then elevated to the 'eternal' definition of work, through a meaning shift of the theoretical register that the definition of labour within the capitalist mode of production seems to authorise. The function of this shift is to provide the foundation for revolution as the liberation of existing labour, given that work is 'eternal'. This 'eternal labour' allows the production of revolution as the liberation of existing labour, but in this instance, through a semantic confusion rooted within a specific class practice, we are assimilating two absolutely different notions and levels.

This labour in its most general form, as an abstraction, possesses no reality beyond the capitalist mode of production. Marx 'slips' from this abstraction which defines labour in general to work as an ontological 'eternal activity'. *The generality of abstract labour which, thus invested with a concrete content, not only authorises this generality, but also becomes 'eternal', ontological labour. We are now at the heart of programmatism.*

Not only is this programmatic, but it is not yet theoretically arbitrary either. In the capitalist mode of production a specific relationship obtains between the natural and the social character of the individual and of labour. If this isolated individual and this labour are expounded as natural, it is not solely for the purpose of endowing capital with a natural foundation; this mutation is intrinsic to the very character of the social relation established by capital. At one of the poles of wage labour we necessarily find living labour-power in a purely subjective form, that is, as a living individual, as the worker's physical existence. In addition to this, social labour is always measured by the time of a

worker's physical expenditure. The foundation of the capitalist social relation is the existence of the worker as a mere physical individual, and the existence of labour as pure physical expense to be measured. However, this 'simple individual' and this 'pure expense' are devoid of all existence prior to their social construction and their measurement.

Therefore, this abstract labour also presents itself as labour in the anthropological sense of the word and, as such, is valid for all modes of production. The social relation is perverted into a natural relationship or, more precisely, both seem to coincide, a construct which the 'critique of work' often endorses in its references to objectivity, nature, and material production.

By reducing this 'eternal labour' to its condition, abstract labour, we take a great step forward in its critique. This broadest of categories appears to us as the formalisation of a particular historical age (as Marx himself suggests in the *1857 Introduction*). The production of a concept that reduces an entire range of diverse activities to a single definition is not self-evident (Aristotle, that 'intellectual giant', was unable to go beyond the diversity of concrete labours). This labour, as the general category Marx speaks of, presupposes that the unity and equality of different labours possess a qualitative unity and equality, i.e., that this concept is dependent on the concept of abstract labour. Ultimately, it is its natural transposition. Abstract labour is this 'eternal labour' in the sense that it presupposes the diversity of concrete labours, exists only in relation to them and thus reverts to the definition of 'eternal labour'. A particular historical form imposes its own specific historical characteristics on the general category described as 'eternal labour'.

The 'eternal labour' Marx speaks of encompasses all human activities, including – and this is one of the essential points of its definition – those activities which Marx, in each particular historical period, considers 'non-labour': those activities which belong to a privileged few and are the condition for the development of the general forces of the human brain. Therefore we must admit that

'eternal labour' (which Marx explicitly defines as the indissoluble transformation of nature and the self-transformation of man) is dissociated into *labour* and *non-labour*. Can the difference in the object of the activity differentiate between labour and non-labour, i.e., can we, in this case, introduce a difference between acting on an 'external nature' and acting on an 'internal nature'? No! Production, in its supposedly most 'material' forms, transforms man's social relationships and presupposes them. Moreover, such a distinction would refer us to a notion of material production as something self-evident, something that goes without saying. In fact, the very reality of this something called 'material production is a social and historical production'. 'Material production' exists only within a division of society.

Therefore, given that 'eternal labour' encompasses the activities of the master (and of his entourage) or of the 'devourers of surplus-value' in the capitalist mode of production, we cannot construe 'eternal labour' out of wage labour or slave labour. If Marx's 'eternal labour' seems truly eternal, then wage labour cannot be a historical form of this 'eternal labour', as it is but one of its aspects.

From this point on we can certainly speak of the abolition of work by the communist revolution, to the extent that, if 'eternal labour' is work, wage labour is not; and if wage labour is work (as we believe), 'eternal labour' is not (work). Wage labour cannot be considered a particular form of this 'eternal labour', nor can the latter be considered an abstraction from all historical forms of labour. In that case, what is the abolition of work? It is the abolition of the possibility of reducing a multitude of singular activities to a common denominator, whatever it may be. It is the impossibility of conceiving of such an abstraction, insofar as society (but can we still speak of society under communism?) is the relation between singular individuals as singular individuals.

What are we talking about when we speak of the abolition of work? The answer is given in the very definition of work from the very moment when we cease to attempt to define it in itself.

In communism, since social relations cease to exist and relations established among singular individuals take their place, work ceases to exist. It is the separation between individuals and the community which defines reciprocal relations between individuals as work and determines them as opposed classes. Work is the self-productive activity of men insofar as this self-production is divided, and its unity lies outside of it in the form of work. If social relations cease to exist, then work ceases to exist; we move on to an immediately universal activity because it is grounded in relations between singular individuals.

The abolition of the independence of the community is the abolition of work, which cannot be distinguished from the abolition of the division of labour, of property, of social classes. These abolitions are not a consequence of the abolition of work, but its sole content. Communist revolution puts an end to and supersedes the old mode of activity by producing the social immediacy of the individual and the coincidence of material life and personal assertion. What is done away with is the very possibility of reducing every singular activity to any common denominator, even if it were the sum of the living, physical activity of individuals as the production and existence of the material world. Before communism, this 'sum', as 'eternal labour', can be conceived of as a generality only because labour is the dissociation of the elements which comprise this generality: its own (labour's) elements on the one hand, and on the other, opposed to it, those of *non-labour* activities. This generality only makes sense because its components are opposed as labour and non-labour.

The need for a general notion of 'eternal labour' ensues from the need to bring together heterogeneous activities: labour and non-labour. This ontological 'eternal labour' is itself consubstantial, in its generality, with the separation of its elements. The reality and the *raison d'être* of the abstraction of (ontological) 'eternal labour' is division, a division which culminates in the dissociation between labour and non-labour. This *essential* division

is absorbed within ontological labour, which is the reality of human self-reproduction within the functioning of a class society.

Since communism begins with relations among individuals as such, we can no longer *presuppose* anything in common as inherent to each individual, even if it were the capacity to produce the material world as the sum of the living, physical activity of the individuals which comprise it. Not that this would be false in itself, but it is only the constantly renewed *result* of all inter-individual relations, not the *content* of these relations as inherent to each individual.

This shift in meaning whereby the most general definition of human activity is called 'work', and which, in Marx's time, was the foundation of theoretical programmatism, has nowadays become a statement that seeks to explain that extraordinary thing for an ideologist, namely, that workers are human (as if 'being human' added anything at all to being a proletarian). For some of them (Chris Arthur, Jean-Louis Bertocchi, Moishe Postone, Jean-Marie Vincent, etc.), the ontological definition of 'eternal labour' would be somehow irreducible to the labour performed by workers, from which we may infer a glorification of labour threatened by its capitalist existence. For others, however, (*Négation*, and afterwards Bruno Astarian, *La Banquise,* and later Gilles Dauvé, *La Guerre Sociale* and Dominique Blanc, etc.), this 'eternal labour' itself is human activity as opposed to work. The latter therefore want to 'abolish work' and discover in this differentiation between human activity and the labour performed by workers (the terms may even completely or partly encompass each other, as one may prefer; the crux of the matter is to have two terms) the motor of this abolition. Whether it is to 'glorify' work or to 'abolish' it, the perspective remains unchanged.

Beyond the 'Critique of Work': Revolution as Communisation

Like all critiques, the critique of the 'critique of work' cannot satisfy itself with criticising its object: work. It must bring to light

the conditions that gave rise to it. The ‘critique of work’ became an ideological expression and a specific practice during the cycle of struggles inaugurated in the 1980s because it solved the contradictions of the old cycle without superseding it, at the same time (and for the same reason) that it discovered in the new cycle a reason to reiterate itself. What was merely the extreme point of the old cycle became, once that cycle’s contradiction between classes was surpassed by the second phase of real subsumption, the immediately available ideological form and practice for the superseding of capitalism. The ‘critique of work’, simultaneously the final expression of the old cycle and the expression of its impossibility, appears to have been right vis-à-vis all the forms of affirmation of the proletariat included within the old cycle and also as the immediate form of superseding a now restructured capital. Immediate, because it spares itself the trouble of positively recognising the restructuring for what it is: a new configuration of the contradiction between classes. It settles for considering this second phase as the long crisis of the preceding phase and as the failure of the old cycle of struggles, the perspective of which it is content to recycle. The ‘critique of work’ considers itself to be consistent with the historical period, and the latter seems to immediately prove it right, legitimise it and confirm it by way of the disappearance, in the immediate course of struggles, of any form of workers’ identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital. To the extent that the ‘critique of work’ seems to solve and overcome the failure of the old cycle of struggles, it appears to be consistent with the new situation.

However, unless we were to limit ourselves to identifying revolution with the impossibility of programmatism, to remain within the bounds of ‘communism by impossibility’, the inexorable ‘human tendency’, or the search for a finally radical autonomy such as it is according to its very concept or to remain within the bounds of the ‘critique of work’ and its ‘refusal’, we must reassess the theory of revolution. In each of its struggles, the proletariat now sees its existence as a class, objectified in the

reproduction of capital, as something alien which it can be led to call into question in the course of its struggle. Within the activity of the proletariat, being a class becomes an external constraint objectified in capital: being a class becomes the obstacle which its struggle as a class must overcome. This is the foundation, at the present time, of a theory of revolution as *communisation*.

The contradiction between the proletariat and capital is now located at the level of overall reproduction and therefore of reciprocal class reproduction. This contradiction no longer involves any confirmation of the proletariat in regard to itself. This is the end of what we call programmatism, of workers' identity, and the end of what others label, in merely descriptive fashion, the 'old labour movement'. Within this structure of the contradiction, the proletariat is quite capable, in its contradiction with capital – which is its reciprocal implication with it – of calling itself into question as a class. It follows from this that the abolition of capital is the abolition of the proletariat, the abolition of all classes and the communisation of society. However, the revolutionary (communist) dynamic of this cycle immediately and inherently discovers its own limit in that according to which it would not even exist: the fact that the proletariat produces its entire existence as a class within capital and no longer in a relation with itself.

The dynamic of this cycle of struggles can only be internal to what constitutes its limit: acting as a class. This identity between dynamic and limit is not immediate; in the course of current struggles, there are practices which produce *rifts* (*écarts*) within class action. To act as a class is currently, on the one hand, to have no other horizon than capital and the categories of its reproduction, and on the other, for the same reason, to be in contradiction with and to question its own reproduction as a class, to call it into question. These are two sides of the same action as a class. This conflict, this *rift* in class action (reproducing itself as a class of this mode of production/calling itself into question) is present in the course of most conflicts.

That the revolution is the abolition of all classes is a current fact in the sense that *the proletariat's action as a class is a limit for itself*. This abolition is not a set goal or a definition of revolution as a norm to be achieved, but a current content of what the class struggle is itself. This is the 'hardest step to take' in the theoretical understanding and practice of contemporary struggles. To produce class belonging as an external constraint is, for the proletariat, to enter into conflict with its previous situation; this is not 'liberation', nor is it 'autonomy'. The proletariat discovers, in what it is against capital, the ability to communise society at the moment when it treats its own class nature as something externalised in capital. On the basis of current struggles, the production of class belonging as an exterior constraint allows us to understand *the pivotal point of class struggle*, its overcoming, as a produced overcoming of *the current cycle of struggles*: in its struggle against capital, the class turns against itself, i.e. it treats its own existence, everything that defines it in its relation to capital (and it is nothing other than this relation) as the limit of its action.

In the course of the revolutionary struggle, the abolition of the state, of exchange, of the division of labour, of all forms of property, the extension of situations where everything is freely available as the unification of human activity – in a word, the abolition of classes, of private and public spheres – are 'measures' which abolish capital and the categories of men and women, imposed by the very necessities of the struggle against the capitalist class and male dominance. The revolution is communisation; it does not have communism as a project and result, but as its very content.

If revolutionary practice is the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing (see Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*) then the question of gender distinction, the construal of the categories of men and women, the outcome of women's struggle since the late 1960s, signal a blind spot in the theory of communisation: something that all the theoretical work involved in the overcoming of programmatism, had

at best more or less consciously ignored, and at worst, deliberately rejected as irrelevant.

In order to salvage the contradiction between proletariat and capital as the revolutionary dynamic of the capitalist mode of production from its programmatic shipwreck, anything which might have appeared as a concession to the exclusive centrality of the class struggle had to be refused. It is obvious, however, that if those who in the early 1970s initiated the critique of programmatism had taken specifically feminine struggles or strikes as well as the specific characteristics of women's activity in the revolutionary struggles since the French Revolution or the English Revolution into account, they would have been 'surprised' to discover within them the contradictions and impasses of programmatism in action. A meticulous study of these revolutionary movements would have revealed that the activity of women within them articulated the impossibility of programmatism on its own terms, its contradictions and its overcoming. What's more, the practices and theoretical productions of the wave of modern feminism of the 60s and 70s were the de facto critique of the workers' movement and of the affirmation of labour. On its own foundation, that of the contradiction between men and women, and by developing its own themes, this feminism signalled to programmatism that it was on its last legs.

Paradoxically, on two fundamentally interrelated points, this 'pure and simple' position amounted to not taking the critique of programmatism and its overcoming as a theory of communisation to its conclusion as the production of the social immediacy of the individual: the critique of the gender distinction, which reformulates the very foundations of the critique of exploitation and of capital as a contradiction in process, and revolutionary practice as the self-transformation of individuals.

1

'Capitalist production, therefore, of itself reproduces the separation between labour-power and the means of labour. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the condition for exploiting the labourer. It incessantly forces him, to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident, that capitalist and labourer confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the process itself that incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economical bondage is both brought about and concealed by the periodic sale of himself, by his change of masters, and by the oscillations in the market price of labour-power.' Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1: the Process of Production of Capital,* (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London and New York: Penguin, 1976, p.723.

2

See Endnotes, 'Afterword', Endnotes, No.1, 2008 (Translator's note).

3

'FIAT in the hands of the workers'. French edition published by Les Nuits Rouges, 2005 (Translator's note).

4

Bill Watson, 'Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor', *Radical America*, Vol.5 No.3, May-June, 1971 (published in French by *Information et Correspondance Ouvrière*, No.115-116, March-April 1972), available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/DTM/. John Zerzan's 'Organized Labour Versus "The Revolt Against Work"' was published in the United States in *Telos*, Autumn 1974 (subsequently in French by *Échanges* in December of 1975), (Solidarity Pamphlet edition) available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/ZJV/

5

'Organized Labour Versus "The Revolt Against Work"' , op. cit., p.4.

6

Ibid.

7

Ibid., p.7.

8

Charlie Reeve, 'Refus du travail ou lutte pour "le droit à la paress"', *Spartacus*, July-August 1976.

9

Anon. 'Contre-interprétation du "contre-planning" dans l'atelier', *ICO*, no.118, June 1972, available: http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article32

10

Ibid.

11

Ibid.

12

Peter Rachleff, *Fifth Estate*, February 1977, 'Anything New in the "Revolt Against Work?": Sabotage and Absenteeism Differ Today' https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/280-february-1977/anything-new-in-the-revolt-against-work/ (Translator's note).

13

Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844' in *Marx and Engels Collected Works Volume 3: Karl Marx March 1843-August 1844,* London: Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 1975, p.341. (Ibid., 10/18, p.159 in the French original).

14

Ibid., p.162.

15

Capital, op. cit., p.283. The original cites op. cit. Ed. Sociales, Vol.1, p.180).

16

Ibid., p.290 in the English edition.

Arguments

Wandering Abstraction

Ray Brassier

Previously published in *Mute*, 13 February 2014, this essay was developed from a paper originally presented at the Accelerationism symposium in Berlin December 2013. In it Ray Brassier critically engages with French left-communist Jacques Camatte's retrieval in the 1960s and 1970s of subsumption through Marx's writings and attempts to draw this work into dialogue with the divergent contemporary theories of 'accelerationism' and 'communisation' whose mutual illumination exposes the problems of articulating cognitive abstraction and social practice.

'Accelerationism' excites passionate condemnation and equally fervent affirmation.[1] Perhaps this is because what is at stake in this 'Marxist heresy' is our relation to the future: is communism, understood as 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things'.[2] Is the consummation of Enlightenment understood as humanity's emancipation from its 'self-incurred tutelage?[3] Or is communism rather the repudiation of an Enlightenment modernity that is nothing but an alibi for the despotism of capital? The version of accelerationism recently proposed by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams affirms the former by reasserting the Enlightenment – and classical Marxist – compact between emancipation and rationality.[4] This new, 'rationalist' accelerationism is intended as a corrective to the vitalist proclivities of its post-structuralist predecessors, best epitomised by Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, in which political agency was hitched to an Aeolian processes of deterritorialisation and emancipation was propelled by the metaphysics of desiring-production.[5] Srnicek and Williams' attempt to decouple accelerationism from vitalist metaphysics requires distinguishing between epistemic and political acceleration as indexes of conceptual and social abstraction respectively. It is the conjunction of the latter pairing that their proposal seeks to articulate. Thus the issue of abstraction, and of its epistemic, social, and political valences, turns out to be central to their reformulation. Of course, Srnicek and Williams' suggestion that the feedback between social and conceptual abstraction might play a positive emancipatory role is controversial. So how are we to understand the relation between these two registers of abstraction?

From a Marxist perspective, understanding the link between them, or between knowledge and politics, requires a theory of social abstraction. More precisely, the Marxist account of 'real abstraction' would provide the key required for the strategic articulation of cognitive abstraction with social abstraction. But if, as Alfred Sohn-Rethel maintained, the latter asymmetrically determines the former then the reassertion of their symmetry will be summarily dismissed as idealist delusion.[6] By the same token,

the varieties of representational modelling that, on Srnicek and Williams' account, are supposed to yield cognitive traction on the abstract dynamics of capital will be disqualified in advance by the claim that such representation is congenitally blind to its own social determination. This demotion of representation follows from the bald claim that capital's real subsumption of intellectual labour reduces all scientific representation to calculation, aping the abstractions of the value-form. But this in turn invites perplexity as to what exactly distinguishes 'good', i.e. cognitively virtuous and politically emancipatory abstraction, from 'bad', i.e. cognitively deficient and politically reactionary abstraction.[7] How do the abstract categories of the Marxist dialectic – capital, labour, value-form, commodity, circulation, production, etc. – succeed or fail to map contemporary social reality when deployed in competing (and often politically antagonistic) explanations? What theory is fit to recognise 'the real movement abolishing the present state of things' in conditions of real subsumption?

I want to broach this question by contrasting accelerationism's attempt at tracking the 'real movement' with that of Jacques Camatte, whose text *The Wandering of Humanity* is not only contemporaneous with those of classical accelerationism but shares their central premise – labour's complete integration into capital – while drawing a radically different conclusion.[8] Capital's 'domestication' of humanity is to be countered not through the Nietzschean overcoming of the 'all too human' (the unleashing of desiring-production, etc.) but through the human community's complete exit from the 'community of capital' enforced under real subsumption.[9] Camatte's analyses in many ways prefigure those of contemporary proponents of communisation. The group Endnotes define communisation as 'the direct destruction of the self-reproducing relation in which workers as workers – and capital as self-valorising value – are and come to be.'[10] But as we shall see, Endnotes reject Camatte's account of the logic of subsumption as well as his claim that human communities can withdraw from capital's self-reproducing relation. They argue

(rightly, in my view) that there can be no exit from the capital relation because it constitutes us: 'What we are is, at the deepest level, constituted by this relation, and it is a rupture with the reproduction of what we are that will necessarily form the horizon of our struggles.'[11] Thus there can be no secession from the capital relation, only its abolition. Communisation is the name for this abolition-in-process. This is a lucid and compelling thesis. But it is the exact sense in which we are constituted by the capital relation, as well as the link between the cognitive and practical conditions for its abolition, that I would like to examine below. The rationale for doing so is the following: although radically antagonistic, communisation and accelerationism can be usefully contrasted in such a way that each illuminates the other's blind-spot in the articulation of cognitive and social abstraction.

Materialising Abstraction

First a preliminary clarification is necessary. The opposition between the abstract and the concrete is closely connected to the opposition between the universal and the particular.[12] These pairs of opposites form a logical grid which allows of four basic permutations: concrete particular and concrete universal, abstract particular and abstract universal. Only the conjunctions of abstract-concrete and universal-particular are ruled out as contradictory. But even this is controversial since Marx speaks of 'concrete abstractions', while Alain Badiou has popularised the notion of a 'universal singularity'. Moreover, many philosophers follow Hegel in defining the 'concrete' as that which is relationally embedded, in contradistinction to the 'abstract', which is isolated or one-sided. In what follows, the terms 'concrete' and 'abstract' do not designate *types* of entity, such as the perceptible and the imperceptible or the material and immaterial. They are used to characterise the ways in which thinking *relates* to entities. As Hegel showed, what seems most concrete, particularity or sensible immediacy, is precisely what is most abstract, and what seems most abstract, universality or conceptual mediation, turns out to be most concrete.[13]

A materialism committed to the reality of abstraction, as Marxism is, must be able to account for this interpenetration of the abstract and the concrete without lapsing into idealism, for which such interpenetration is pre-ordained because reality is ultimately endowed with conceptual structure. The challenge for materialism is to acknowledge the reality of abstraction without conceding to idealism that reality possesses *irreducible* conceptual form. Thus materialism must be able to explain what constitutes the reality of conceptually formed abstraction without hypostatising that form. The key to the de-reification of abstraction is an account of conceptual form as generated by social practices. This requires distinguishing between practice and labour: all labour involves practice, but not every practice counts as labour. This distinction will turn out to be significant when we consider Endnotes' account of the relation between labour and capital.

Camatte's Exit Thesis

Camatte was a close associate of Amadeo Bordiga (co-founder of the Italian Communist Party) and a member of the International Communist Party. In the early 1970s, disenchanted with communist 'programmatism', he set out an internal critique of Marx's 'productivism'. Marxism, argues Camatte, is 'the authentic consciousness of the capitalist mode of production'.[14] But the onset of real subsumption reduces Marx's work to 'historical materialism', which is:

> [T]he glorification of the wandering in which humanity has been engaged for more than a century: [the] growth of productive forces as condition *sine qua non* for liberation. But by definition all quantitative growth takes place in the sphere of the indefinite, the false infinite. Who will measure the 'size' of the productive forces to determine whether or not the great day has come? For Marx there was a double and contradictory movement: growth of productive forces and immiseration of proletarians; this was to lead

> to a revolutionary collision. Put differently, there was a contradiction between the socialization of production and private appropriation.[15]

The trouble is that the contradictory movement has failed to issue in the longed for revolutionary crisis: the moment of collision between capital and labour appears to have been indefinitely postponed. What has averted the crisis is capital's 'run-away': the fact that 'it has absorbed the crises and it has successfully provided a social reserve for proletarians.'[16] Capital's run-away development is secured by the onset of its 'real subsumption' of labour. What is real subsumption? Marx defines 'formal subsumption' as the process in which capital integrates an existing labour process: techniques, markets, means of production, workers, etc. But the development of capital inexorably transforms social relations and modes of labour in accordance with its own requirements. The real subsumption of the labour process occurs once every aspect of the latter has been subordinated to capitalist production, whose end is simply the self-valorisation of value. For Camatte, as for many other Marxists, this is the situation we find ourselves in. Writing in the early 1970s, Camatte traces its inception to the end of the Second World War (we will consider below Endnotes' critique of Camatte's use of subsumption as a tool of periodisation). Once capital has wholly subsumed labour, Camatte writes:

> Development in the context of wandering is development in the context of mystification. Marx considered mystification the result of a reversed relation: capital, the product of workers' activity, appears to be the creator. [But] the mystification is rooted in real events; it is reality in process that mystifies. Something is mystified even through a struggle of the proletariat against capital; the generalized mystification is the triumph of capital. But if, as a consequence of its anthropomorphization, this reality produced by mystification is now the sole reality, then the question

> has to be put differently. 1) Since the mystification is stable and real, there is no point in waiting for a demystification which would only expose the truth of the previous situation [i.e. the condition of formal subsumption]. 2) Because of capital's run-away, the mystification appears as reality, and thus the mystification is engulfed and rendered inoperative. We have the despotism of capital.[17]

The process of valorisation subordinates worker's activity to the activity of capital. The despotism of real subsumption renders ideology critique redundant (here Camatte arrives via a different route at the same conclusion as his accelerationist contemporaries, Deleuze & Guattari, Lyotard, and Baudrillard). He continues:

> The assertion that the mystification is still operative would mean that human beings are able to engage in real relations and are continually mystified. In fact, the mystification was operative once and became reality. It refers to a historical stage completed in the past […] Both the mystifying-mystified reality as well as the previously mystified reality have to be destroyed. The mystification is only 'visible' if one breaks (without illusions about the limitations of this break) with the representations of capital.[18]

Having installed mystification in place of reality, capitalism now constitutes itself as a 'material community' by becoming its own representation. Camatte's reasoning is frustratingly allusive here but it can be tentatively reconstructed. Under real subsumption, everything produced by human beings, whether manually or intellectually, is mediated by the value-form and hence represented as abstractly equivalent to everything else. Value as general equivalent reduces everything to the value it represents and converts everything into a representation of value. In so doing capital represents itself as the relation through which each thing (i.e.

commodity) is represented in its relation to every other thing. All labour is reduced to capital's own abstract self-valorisation:

> Capitalism becomes representation through the following historical movement: exchange-value becomes autonomous, human beings are expropriated, human activity is reduced to labour, and labour is reduced to abstract labour […] Capital reconstructs the human being as a function of its process…. [Thus] all human activity 'eternalizes' capital.[19]

Camatte then envisages three possible outcomes for the capitalist mode of production:

> [1] [The] complete autonomy of capital: a mechanistic utopia where human beings become simple accessories of an automated system, though still retaining an executive role
> [2] [The] mutation of the human being, or rather, a change of the species: [the] production of a perfectly programmable being which has lost all the characteristics of the species *homo sapiens* [these characteristics being, in Camatte's account, the capacities of 'creators, producers, users' rather than mere labourers]
> [3] Generalized lunacy: in the place of human beings, and on the basis of their present limitations, capital realizes everything they desire (normal or abnormal), but human beings cannot find themselves and enjoyment continually lies in the future. The human being is carried off in the run-away of capital, and keeps it going.[20]

The upshot of this diagnosis is the claim that the classical Marxist project of unfettering the forces of production from capitalist relations of production is nothing but the self-consciousness (i.e. the mystificatory self-representation) of the capitalist mode of production. Because it failed to foresee the 'run-away' of capital, Marxism remains complicit in capital's own self-valorisation: it

lacks the critical resources required to effect a definitive break with capitalism and all its works. Thus Camatte rejects the primacy of production and the concomitant definition of communism as the 'free association of producers':

> Communism is not a new mode of production; it is the affirmation of a new community [*Gemeinwesen*]. It is a question of being, of life, if only because there is a fundamental displacement: from generated activity to the living being who produced it. Until now men and women have been alienated by this production. They will not gain mastery over production, but will create new relations among themselves which will determine an entirely different activity.[20]

While society subordinates generating life to generated activity, community re-establishes the primacy of generating over generated. Shorn of the mystifications of productivism, revolution is simply the overturning of this inverted hierarchy. Through this overturning, communism's 'real movement' constitutes a new form of life. It is inaugurated by a new human community that breaks with existing social structures, thereby facilitating different, if not unprecedented, modes of expressive activity.

There is a straightforward rejoinder to Camatte's account: his appeal to a human community whose basic expressive modalities remain constant across millennia of social and historical transformation is an abstraction in the most problematic sense. Camatte hypostatises a set of human expressive capacities that persist not only independently of capitalism but of every form of social organisation: 'creating', 'producing', and 'using' are postulated as invariants of human life as such. But attributing these capacities to 'life' renders them indeterminate: they are no longer socio-historical or even biological categories but postulates of a speculative anthropology. Moreover, the affirmation of community over society unwittingly echoes a familiar reactionary trope: while community ensures that social roles, values, and beliefs

remain firmly rooted in interpersonal relations, society jeopardises these by instituting impersonal roles, formal values, and objective beliefs on the basis of indirect interactions. Here Camatte's denunciation of the despotism of capital shades into a repudiation of modernity, which becomes a cipher for humanity's wandering away from its authentic communality.

However, on a planet of seven billion people, the mediation of the interpersonal by the impersonal is not just unavoidable but indispensable. Tethering collectivity to community obstructs the need for a maximally expansive human solidarity. The inclusiveness of the 'we' requires some measure of depersonalisation. Impersonality, impartiality, and objectivity are not necessarily pathologies of social alienation; they can be (and have been) positive resources for expanding the horizons of socialisation beyond parochial communitarian limits. It is precisely generic identification with what Marx called 'species being', understood not as a biological category but as the capacity for collective self-transformation (beyond self-reproduction), that staves off the divisive identifications of individuality, ethnicity, nationality, etc.[21] Communism in Marx's sense is the materialisation of what would otherwise remain an abstract ideal of humanity. Because it is not anchored in any historical mode of production, the community invoked by Camatte becomes an Archimedean point from which humanity has supposedly been wandering. For Camatte, the onset of real subsumption seems to mark the terminal phase of humanity's fateful self-estrangement. But there is reason to doubt whether the distinction between formal and real subsumption can be used to characterise distinct successive phases of capitalism's historical development. Viewed analytically rather than historically, it seems that formal and real subsumption are simultaneous, intertwined aspects of the capital relation. Moreover, Camatte's insistence that capital has now achieved complete dominion, not just over the sphere of production, but over every aspect of social existence, is equally contentious. This is a point forcefully made by Endnotes:

> The labour process in both real and formal subsumption is the immediate production process of capital. Nothing comparable can be said of anything beyond the production process, for it is only production which capital directly claims as its own. While it is true that the valorisation process of capital in its entirety is the unity of the processes of production and circulation, and whilst capital brings about transformations to the world beyond its immediate production process, these transformations by definition cannot be grasped in the same terms as those which occur within that process under real subsumption. Nothing external to the immediate production process actually becomes capital nor, strictly speaking, is subsumed under capital.[22]

Thus while giving credit to Camatte for having grasped 'the ontological inversion, the possession of material life by the spirit of capital',[23] Endnotes see in his account of total subsumption 'the logic which would propel [him] towards a politics involving little more than the abstract assertion of some true human community against a monolithic capitalist totality, and of the need to "leave this world."'[24] Yet although concurring with Camatte that 'value and capital constitute a forceful, totalising form of socialisation that shapes every aspect of life' and acknowledging that 'overcoming [value and capital] demands a radical transformation of every sphere of life'[25], Endnotes also recognise that Camatte's 'undomesticated' humanity existing outside the capitalist social relation is the corollary of an ideal rather than the motor of a real movement. The question then is: given the 'ontological inversion' through which 'material life' itself is now 'animated' by capital, who or what are the agents of communisation?

The Paradox of Self-Abolition

Endnotes firmly repudiate the notion that communisation consists in an immediate secession from the capital relation. They formulate what is perhaps the most cogent objection to the 'exit thesis'.

It is addressed not only to Camatte but to groups like Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee:

> Instead of theoretical reckoning with the concrete totality that must be overcome in all its determinations, or a reconstruction of the real horizon of the class relation, we get a sundering of the totality into two basic abstractions [i.e. capitalist society and the human community], and a simple set of exhortations and practical prescriptions whose real theoretical function is to bring these abstractions into relation once more.[26]

It is the very abstractness of humanity's notional exit from capital that unwittingly guarantees its continuing subsumption by capital. This is the fundamental problem. For Endnotes, the fact that the dialectical antagonism between capital and labour has failed to issue in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist relations of production is not just an unfortunate contingency, the result of missed opportunities. It is an inevitable consequence of the logic of capital accumulation:

> As it accumulates, capital both exploits tendentially fewer workers, expelling labour-power from production (both relatively and ultimately absolutely) and it attempts to raise the rate of exploitation among the relatively diminished work force.[27]

Thus capital's accumulation of an ever-growing surplus-value is accompanied by an ever-growing 'surplus population' excluded from the process of production. The proletariat becomes 'that which is produced by capital without producing capital.'[28] The result is the disintegration of the proletariat's self-identification as producers of capital. It becomes impossible for the working class to affirm itself *as such* in its antagonism with capital.[29] This is why communisation can no longer be conceived as the end result

of the workers' revolutionary seizure of the means of production. It must be reconceived as an intransitive process, an immanent movement which consists in destroying the relation through which capital reproduces labour while labour reproduces capital.[30]

Thus Endnotes define communisation as an attempt to respond to the following question:

> How will the overcoming of the capitalist class relation take place given that it is impossible for the proletariat to affirm itself as a class yet we are still faced with the problem of this relation?[31]

Their answer to this question sets out what is perhaps the most sophisticated formulation of the communisation thesis and deserves quoting at length:

> Communization is a movement at the level of totality, through which that totality is abolished. The logic of the movement that abolishes this totality necessarily differs from that which applies at the level of the concrete individual or group: it should go without saying that no individual or group can overcome the reproduction of the capitalist class relation through their own actions. The determination of an individual act as 'communizing' flows only from the overall movement of which it is part, not from the act itself, and it would therefore be wrong to think of the revolution in terms of the sum of already-communizing acts, as if all that was needed was a certain accumulation of such acts to a critical point […] Communization occurs only at the limit of a struggle, in the rift that opens as this struggle meets its limit and is pushed beyond it […] [I]n any actual supersession of the capitalist class relation *we ourselves* must be overcome; 'we' have no 'position' apart from the capitalist class relation. What we are is, at the deepest level, constituted by this relation, and it is a rupture

> with the reproduction of what we are that will necessarily form the horizon of our struggles […] In this period, the 'we' of revolution does not affirm itself, does not identify itself positively, because it cannot; it cannot assert itself against the 'they' of capital without being confronted by the problem of its own existence – an existence which it will be the nature of the revolution to overcome. There is nothing to affirm in the capitalist class relation; no autonomy, no alternative, no outside, no secession.[32]

This is a remarkable passage. Since the 'we' is constituted by the class relation, the self-overcoming of the 'we' is the overcoming of the relation that constitutes it. This is certainly theoretically uncompromising (and admirable because of it). But it is also paradoxical, and its paradoxical character exacerbates its status as a claim that articulates conceptual and social abstraction at an ontological level. The paradox is the following: if 'we' are constituted by the class relation that we have to supersede, then the supersession of this relation is also the overcoming of the agent of the supersession, and therefore the cancelling of the supersession and the re-instatement of the 'we'. Since 'we' have no position apart from the class relation, 'we' are nothing outside of it. But then the moment of the abolition of this relation is also that of the abolition of its abolition. Can revolutionary agency – which is supposed to track 'the real movement abolishing the present state of things' – really be constructed on the basis of such an apparently disabling paradox? If the answer is affirmative, we need to clarify the precise sense in which Endnotes' articulation of conceptual and social abstraction has an *ontological* purchase.[33]

The articulation is ontological because the abstractions of capitalism are *real*: in subsuming labour, the value-form *logicises* the social practices through which human beings reproduce themselves and capital:

> That which on one level is merely contingent relative to the logic of capital accumulation – the material and spiritual interactions betweens humans and between humans and nature – is itself *logicised* – i.e. brought under the logic of the capital-form of value – as a result of the subsumption of labour under capital, and of the self-reproduction of the relation of reciprocal implication between capital and proletariat.[34]

This logicisation of social reality explains why there can be a contradiction between what human beings think and do in relating to themselves, or what they think and do in reproducing capital. But this logicisation by the value-form is not absolute: it applies to human activities and practices only insofar as they constitute labour. These activities and practices persist within the capital relation as phenomena that it has incorporated but not wholly absorbed. They are not wholly absorbed because they constitute the process through which capital absorbs labour. Capital's self-reproduction is constituted by phenomena that it cannot reproduce, even as it reproduces the labour which in turn reproduces it. Thus capital's logicisation of reality is itself conditioned by that reality; this is the bulwark against absolute idealism, which would hypostatise capital as a wholly autonomous, self-moving subject (a *causa sui* or self-causing being) floating free of material reality altogether:

> Without human relations and practices which subsist in the 'mode of being denied' through the perverted, fetishistic form of economic categories, there could be no economic categories: no value, no commodities, money or capital. This does not mean, however, that labour should be understood as somehow constitutive of the entire process; nor should it be understood as primary. The fetish-forms of capital are properly understood and criticised as self-moving, perverted forms of social practice.[35]

Thus 'capital is nothing other than a perverted form of human social relations.'[36] But it is 'human relations and practices', rather than labour, which generate the real abstractions of capital. From the perspective of the systematic dialectic espoused by Endnotes, labour is always already inscribed within the value-form as its 'posited presupposition'.[37] While capital posits the labour that provides its substance (i.e. its presupposition), this positing itself is ultimately constituted through the extraordinarily complex set of human practices without which capital's self-valorisation could not *be*. Value's subsumption of labour as 'posited presupposition' also presupposes something that it does *not* posit: spontaneous human activity. As Endnotes themselves make clear, the spontaneity invoked here should be understood in the Kantian sense, as the determination of sensation exercised by the human mind in the act of thinking. Kant attributed this spontaneity to what he called 'pure apperception':

> In the eighteenth century, when Kant described the transcendental unity of apperception – the fact that I am aware of myself as having my own experiences – he called this a spontaneous act. Kant meant the opposite of something natural. A spontaneous act is one that is freely undertaken. In fact, the word spontaneous derives from the Latin *sponte*, meaning 'of one's own accord, freely, willingly'. In this sense, spontaneity is not about acting compulsively or automatically. It is a matter of acting without external constraint.[38]

Spontaneity in Kant's transcendental, as opposed to empirical sense, is the ultimate source of human freedom. It seems plausible to suggest that Endnotes need recourse to freedom in this transcendental sense in order to stave off the paradox of self-abolition by grounding the possibility of human agency in a source that is independent of the class relation. As the ultimate wellspring of human activity, this transcendental (as opposed to empirical) spontaneity may be construed as what constitutes the class relation

independently of the class relation's constitution of the 'we'. The paradox is then defused because the agent of the abolition is distinct from the abolished agent. But in opposing spontaneity to compulsion, Endnotes risk resuscitating a transcendental voluntarism, in which the human will functions as a mysterious, not to say supernatural, unmoved mover, impervious to external determination. This is the familiar and much pilloried caricature of Kant. There is a better, more dialectical reading of him, which understands the freedom exercised in the spontaneity of apperception as resulting from the will's embrace of an intersubjectively instituted rule, rather than a wholly un-determined eruption ex nihilo. Freedom in this sense is not simply the absence of external determination but the agent's rational self-determination in and through its espousal of a universally applicable rule.[39] In this sense, spontaneity is thinking as a kind of *doing*, rather than as contemplation, and this is the source of the human activities and practices that constitute the abstractions of capital.

Moreover, in this regard, nominalism can be deployed as a weapon of materialist analysis that demystifies the idealist hypostatisation of abstraction. In Wilfrid Sellars' metalinguistic version of nominalism, which is perhaps the most sophisticated elaboration of the thesis yet devised, reference to abstract entities is explained as a material mode of metalinguistic discourse about linguistic functioning, while this functioning is in turn identified with patterns of linguistic tokenings.[40] What is especially valuable about Sellars' analysis from a materialist viewpoint is that it treats abstract entities as hypostatised linguistic functions. It shows how conceptual form is anchored in linguistic function and grounds linguistic function in social practice. Of course, Sellars' account stops short of explaining the nature of the linkage between linguistic function and social practice. He has no theory of the latter. But his work has the signal merit of telling us what abstract entities really are. This is an important step towards explaining how capital's apparently self-moving abstractions are in fact motored by the activities and practices of human beings.

But while it is one thing to reveal that the reality of abstraction is rooted in human practice, it is another thing to explain how and which practice can be deployed to release us from the grip of the abstractions to which it has subjected us. Even if one grants that the abstractions of capital are generated through human practices, how are these practices supposed to constitute a communising agency? Endnotes propose an answer of sorts in another remarkable passage that delves deeper still in its attempt to define the relation between communist theory and capitalist reality:

> Communist theory sets out not from the false position of some voluntarist subject, but from the posited supersession of the totality of forms which are implicated in the reproduction of this subject. As merely posited, this supersession is necessarily abstract, but it is only through this basic abstraction that theory takes as its content the determinate forms which are to be superseded; forms which stand out in their determinacy precisely because their dissolution has been posited.[41]

These 'determinate forms' are the real abstractions of capitalism: the commodity-form, the money-form, the value-form, the labour-form, the production-form, etc. The passage continues:

> This positing is not only a matter of methodology, or some kind of necessary postulate of reason, for the supersession of the capitalist class relation is not a mere theoretical construct.

It is not a 'mere theoretical construct' but nor is it some objective or 'given' datum, for it is something towards which theory orients itself, rather than something it statically contemplates. Thus this posited supersession is something that:

> [R]uns ahead of thought, being posited incessantly by this [capitalist class] relation itself; it is its very horizon as an antagonism, the real negative presence which it [communist theory] bears. Communist theory is produced by – and necessarily thinks within – this antagonistic relation; it is thought of the class relation, and it grasps itself as such. It attempts to conceptually reconstruct the totality which is its ground, in the light of the already-posited supersession of this totality, and to draw out the supersession as it presents itself here. Since it is a relation which has no ideal 'homeostatic' state, but one which is always beyond itself, with capital facing the problem of labour at every turn – even in its victories – the adequate thought of this relation is not of some equilibrium state, or some smoothly self-positing totality; it is of a fundamentally impossible relation, something that is only insofar as it is ceasing to be; an internally unstable, antagonistic relation. Communist theory thus has no need of an external, Archimedean point from which to take the measure of its object, and communization has no need of a transcendent standpoint of 'withdrawal' or 'secession' from which to launch its 'attack'.[42]

Endnotes' various writings certainly provide an eminently plausible conceptual reconstruction of the totality which is the ground of the class relation, and hence of communist theorising. And it is clear from their analyses of capital's 'moving contradiction' how this relation is self-undermining: 'the relation of exploitation corrodes its own foundation, as that which is exploited – labour-power – is tendentially expelled from the production process with the development of the productivity of social labour.'[42] Thus the thought that is 'adequate' to the class relation (i.e. the relation of exploitation) is the thought of a 'fundamentally impossible relation', which is 'only insofar as it is ceasing to be'.

That only the thought of an impossible relation can render theory adequate to its object is the index of the torsion that is

supposed to bind theoretical abstraction to the reality of social abstraction independently of the representational recourse to an objective correspondence relation (which would require 'an external, Archimedean point from which to take the measure of its object'). No doubt, this impossible relation is supposed to mark communist theory's immanence to revolutionary practice: any subordination of practice to theory (or vice versa) would threaten to reintroduce the transcendence of an external Archimedean point, which is to say, a representation. But it seems that what prevents communist theory's adequation to the class relation from fissioning into a relation to this impossible relation, which is to say, a theoretical representation of reality, and ultimately, a program, is its immediate consummation as *self-proclaimed* revolutionary activity: an activity that guarantees its own traction upon the capitalist class relation simply by engaging in the struggle to destroy it. There is a laudable consistency here. By taking the 'posited supersession' of the capitalist totality as its starting point, communist theorising secures its traction upon the antagonism constitutive of social reality. But the danger remains that this posited supersession of totality will substitute for its actual supersession not in spite of but precisely *because* it refuses its theoretical construction.

Repurposing and Social Form

By abjuring such construction as a representational intrusion compromising thought's adequation to the class relation, communist theory secures its grip on the 'real movement' which communism *is*, but at the risk of eliding real movement with the movement of ideas. Thus, as Endnotes themselves make clear:

> Communization […] has little positive advice to give us about particular, immediate practice in the here and now […] What advice it can give is primarily negative: the social forms implicated in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation will not be instruments of the revolution, since they are part of that which is to be abolished.[43]

The question then is: how are we to identify those social forms that are *not* implicated in the reproduction of the class relation? The distinction between compulsive labour and spontaneous practice is required not only to stave off the paradox of self-cancellation, but also to distinguish between those activities programmed to reproduce the class relation and those capable of interrupting this reproduction. But the spontaneity whose exercise is the prerequisite for the destruction of the class relation will also generate new abstractions together with new forms of mediation. What is required is an understanding of social practices that would allow us to begin distinguishing between oppressive and emancipatory forms of mediation.

This is what we currently lack. In the meantime, must we abjure every existing instrument, technique, or method enveloped by capitalist social forms? No doubt, it is relatively easy to identify those modes of contemporary information technology whose stupefying, anti-social consequences render them worthy of abolition. But there are other technologies that are perhaps not so easily abolished. Consider antivirals. Every aspect of their development is implicated in capitalist institutions and enveloped by its social forms. Does this mean antivirals are intrinsically capitalist and hence ought to play no role in a post-capitalist society? A negative response recommends itself here: while technological function is socially mediated and enveloped by the value-form, this need not be a *saturated* mediation: it need not exhaust the functional potentialities of the technology in question. Some might retort that talk of repurposing is a distraction at best, an alibi for reformism at worst, because the development of antivirals (like every other contemporary technology) is necessarily linked to that of capitalist social relations, the proliferation of lethal viruses being a direct consequence of industrialised livestock production and globalisation.[44] Were it not for these two factors, the objection goes, we would not be so susceptible to increasing varieties of pathogens and human welfare would not be mortgaged to the development of antivirals. The dismantling

of capitalism, according to this line of argument, would radically diminish if not wholly eliminate our increasing dependence on antivirals as well as other technological artefacts.

Now, it is undoubtedly true that there is a direct correlation between the proliferation of life-threatening viruses and the conditions of globalised capitalist society. It may also be true that dismantling the latter is the surest means of eradicating the former. And there is no doubt that the redistribution of antivirals on the basis of need rather than wealth is a more pressing political concern than speculating on their role in post-capitalist society. Nevertheless, the urgency of the former does not obviate the importance of the latter. The absolute or indeterminate negation of capitalist society and all its works would eradicate the pathologies generated by capitalism only at the cost of cancelling the emancipatory potentials latent in technologies whose functioning is currently subordinated to capital. The abstract negation of functional context is also the negation of emancipatory possibilities whose release depends upon the re-contextualisation of function. Such abstraction in-determines instead of determining the fusion of cognitive and practical orientation required for the realisation of communism. It abolishes the capitalist present at the cost of cancelling the post-capitalist future locked up within it. Foreclosing the future, blinkered negation cannot but wish to re-instate the past. It becomes the longing for a previous state of things: 'If only we hadn't domesticated animals and started down the road to industrialised agriculture; if only we didn't live in a massively interconnected global society…' And ultimately: 'If only capitalism hadn't happened.'

But Marx's starting point is the acknowledgement that capitalism *has* happened, and given this premise, his fundamental question is: how can we move beyond capitalism without regressing to pre-capitalist social formations, such as agrarian feudalism? The problem of repurposing cannot be circumvented by wishing capitalism had never happened. History suggests that there are things worse than the value-form. A suitably abstract conception

of function will allow for its transplantation, and where necessary, repurposing, across social contexts. It goes without saying that this should only be envisaged as a consequence of overcoming the capital relation, not a substitute for this overcoming. More generally, determination is not constitution. We have to find a way to articulate theoretical and social abstraction that does not involve the complete or indiscriminate relinquishment of the achievements of capitalist modernity *en bloc*.

Conclusion

The issue of the realisation of function is crucial for clarifying the relation between conceptual and real abstraction. Communisation short-circuits conceptual abstraction and social abstraction in an insurrectionary praxis whose fixation on totality prevents it from formulating criteria for distinguishing between progressive and regressive social forms. Perhaps the real import of the accelerationism defended by Srnicek and Williams is as an intervention into the politics of abstraction.[45] They argue that the representation of abstraction is not only unavoidable but necessary in order to mount an epistemic and political challenge to capitalism. But the fact that such representation is necessary does not guarantee that it is possible to align epistemic and political acceleration, or more basically, that it will be possible to align theoretical explanation with emancipatory activity. Doing so requires the social realisation of cognition, which is what communisation's focus on totality acknowledges even if it arguably prevents it from achieving it. Without a theory of the totality that articulates explanatory rationality with emancipatory causality, it becomes difficult to understand the conditions under which epistemic practices might be realised. This is arguably accelerationism's chief lacuna. What is required is an account of the link between the conceptual and the social at the level of practice, which is to say, an account of the way in which cognitive function supervenes on social practices. This is what neither accelerationism nor communisation currently provide.

1

The term 'accelerationism' was coined by Benjamin Noys in his book *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). See especially pp.5–8.

2

Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Ed. Robert C. Tucker, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, p.162.

3

This is Kant's formulation in 'What is Enlightenment' (1784) and one which I believe is concretised rather than jettisoned by Marx through Hegel. Humanity's emancipation from superhuman authority, whether natural or divine, is the condition of human freedom, which Kant also calls 'autonomy'. Autonomy should not to be confused with independence: one can be autonomous yet still dependent. The 'humanity' affirmed here is characterised by its capacity for self-transformation, not its biological attributes. Rationality understood as a social practice is central to this capacity for self-transformation. To say that rational beings should not recognise any non-rational authority (because the latter would be a force, not an authority) does not mean that rational beings should ignore or disregard everything non-rational. Rational animals ignore their animality at their peril.

4

See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,* http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/. I am also drawing on two as yet unpublished texts: Nick Srnicek, 'Accelerationism: Epistemic, Economic, Political' (2013) and Alex Williams, 'The Politics of Abstraction' (2013).

5

Anti-Oedipus contains the *locus classicus* of accelerationism: 'But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World Countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go further still, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialisation? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialised enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process", as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, London: Athlone, pp.239-40.

6

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a Critique of Epistemology*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1977. For an illuminating discussion of Sohn-Rethel's contemporary relevance, see Alberto Toscano 'The Culture of Abstraction' in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.25, No.4, 2008, pp.57-75, and 'The Open Secret of Real Abstraction' in *Rethinking Marxism,* Vol.20, No.2, 2008, pp.273-287.

7

Unless of course one insists that abstraction *per se* is bad: a move whose debilitating consequences for thought hardly need spelling out.

8

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'anti-Oedipe,* Paris: Minuit, 1972; Jean-François Lyotard *Des dispositifs pulsionels,* Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973 and *Économie libidinale,* Paris: Minuit, 1974, Jean Baudrillard *Le mirroir de la production*, Tournai: Casterman, 1973, *L'échange symbolique et la mort,* Paris: Gallimard 1976. The English edition of Camatte's *The Wandering of Humanity*, (Trans. Fredy Perlman), Detroit: Black & Red, 1975, comprises two texts originally published (in French) in the journal *Invariance* in 1973.

9

Camatte uses the German word *Gemeinwesen*, which can be translated as 'community' or 'commonwealth', and seems to intend a contrast between (human) community and (capitalist) society or *Gesellschaft*. This distinction originates in the work of the

German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936). See his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft,* Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1887, translated by Charles Price Loomis as *Community and Society* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press 1957). The distinction was also taken up by Max Weber in *Economy and Society*, (Trans. and Eds. Guenter Roth and Claus Wittich), University of California Press, (1921) 1978.

10

Endnotes, 'Crisis in the Class Relation' in *Endnotes II: Misery and the Value Form,* April 2010, https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/2

11

Endnotes, 'What Are We to Do?' in *Communization and its Discontents*, ed. Benjamin Noys, New York: Minor Compositions, 2011, p.31.

12

Traditionally, particulars are ultimate subjects of predication, uninstantiable, and spatiotemporal, whereas universals are predicated, multiply instantiable, and hence non-spatiotemporal.

13

I elaborate on this point in 'Lived Experience and the Myth of the Given' *Filozofski Vestnik*, Vol.XXXII, No.3, 2011.

14

The Wandering of Humanity, op. cit., 1975, p.22.

15

Ibid., p.23.

16

Ibid., p.23.

17

Ibid., p.24.

18

Ibid., p.24.

19

Ibid., pp.6-7.

20

Ibid., p.36.

21

For a discussion of the contemporary relevance of the idea of 'generic humanity' see Nina Power 'Badiou and Feuerbach: What is Generic Humanity?' *Subject Matters: A Journal of Communication and the Self*, Vol.2, no.1, 2005.

22

Endnotes 'The History of Subsumption' in *Endnotes II: Misery and the Value Form,* op. cit., https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/the-history-of-subsumption

23

Endnotes 'Communisation and Value-Form Theory' in *Endnotes II: Misery and the Value Form,* op. cit., https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/communisation-and-value-form-theory

24

Ibid. This is a reference to Camatte's *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays,* Ed. Alex Trotter (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1995).

25

Ibid.

26

'What Are We to Do?', op.cit., p.33.

27

Endnotes 'The Moving Contradiction' in *Endnotes II: Misery and the Value Form,* op. cit., https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/the-moving-contradiction

28

'Crisis in the Class Relation', op. cit.

29

'As that part of the global population diminishes whose reproduction is mediated through the exchange of productive labour for the wage, the wage form as the key mediation in social reproduction may appear increasingly tenuous. With these shifting conditions, the horizon of the class relation, and the struggles in which this horizon presents itself, must inevitably change. In this context, the old projects of a programmatic workers' movement become obsolete: their world was one of an expanding industrial workforce in which the wage appeared as the fundamental link in the chain of social reproduction, at the centre of the the *double moulinet* [a turning device, e.g. coffee grinder, with two chambers or corresponding movements. Used by TC to describe the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing circuits of the reproduction of labour and capital] where capital and proletariat meet, and in which a certain mutuality of wage demands – an 'if you want this of me, I demand this of you' – could dominate the horizon of class struggle. But with the growth of surplus populations, this very mutuality is put into question, and the wage form is thereby decentred as

a locus of contestation. Tendentially, the proletariat does not confront capital at the centre of the *double moulinet*, but relates to it as an increasingly external force, whilst capital runs into its own problems of valorisation.' Endnotes 'Crisis in the Class Relation', op. cit.

30

For a critical discussion of the 'intransitivity' of communisation, see Alberto Toscano 'Now and Never' in *Communization and its Discontents*, op. cit., pp.85-101.

31

'What Are We to Do?', op. cit., p.29.

32

Ibid., p.31.

33

The claim that contradiction is obviously an ontological category, and that we have known this since Hegel, is problematic because it assumes that Hegel is a metaphysician who believes in real contradictions; a claim that much recent Hegel scholarship has been at pains to challenge. It is propositions (or judgements) that contradict one another, not things. Since contradiction is an intra-conceptual relation, the thesis of real contradictions seems to commit one to the sort of metaphysical idealism which insists that reality has propositional form. This is an assumption materialists should not be prepared to accept. The more plausible materialist construal of Hegel's claim is that contradictions are *true*, not that they are constitutive of 'reality', whatever that might mean. This is an ongoing controversy, but the seminal text is Robert Pippin's *Hegel's Idealism,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pippin's reading has been vigorously contested, but it has undeniably reinvigorated Hegel scholarship by challenging traditional metaphysical interpretations of 'absolute idealism'. Robert Brandom's interpretation of Hegel also rebuts the metaphysical reading: see *A Spirit of Trust: A Semantic Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology,* available: http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/spirit_of_trust.html

34

Ibid.

35

Ibid.

36

Ibid. See also Endnotes 'Communisation and Value Form Theory', op. cit.

37

Endnotes, 'Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture' in *Endnotes III: Gender, Race, Class and Other Misfortunes,* September, 2013, https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/spontaneity-mediation-rupture

38

Thus rather than opposing spontaneity to compulsion and freedom to necessity, it is dialectically preferable to understand spontaneity as the will's compulsion in and by a rule, rather than as the refusal of compulsion by an obscurely sovereign, un-determinable will. Transcendental spontaneity is rational self-determination as the internalisation of conceptual constraint.

39

I give a more detailed account of the ontological consequences of Sellars' metalinguistic nominalism in 'Nominalism, Naturalism, and Materialism: Sellars' Critical Ontology' in *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and its Implications*, Eds. Bana Bashour and Hans Muller, London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

40

Ibid., p.34

41

Ibid., p.34

42

Endnotes. 'The Moving Contradiction', op. cit.

43

Ibid., p.28.

44

I owe this objection to Benjamin Noys.

45

As well as being the title of an unpublished paper by Alex Williams, this is also the title of a paper by Matteo Pasquinelli (http://matteopasquinelli.com/politics-of-abstraction/), and of Alberto Toscano's contribution to *The Idea of Communism, Vol.1* (Verso 2010).

Arguments

Differentiated Spatialities of Subsumption and the Social Factory as Phantom Thesis

Neil Gray

This text was solicited some time after the initial seminar in Bilbao on the basis of a shared interest in debates around subsumption, the social factory and theories of capital. The text indicates the centrality of Marx's theory of subsumption to Mario Tronti's concept of the social factory, but challenges the claims made around this concept within the *operaismo* and post-*operaismo* traditions by arguing instead that questions of urbanisation, transport and communications are yet to be made truly central to a study of capital and class during this period.

The question of subsumption across the entire social terrain was implicit in the concept of the social factory developed within Italian *operaismo*, even if in practice Mario Tronti's notion of the whole of society as 'an articulation of production' was never fully developed.[1] I say 'implicit' because the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* (where Marx's critical-social concept of subsumption arises in its most fully developed form) was not translated into Italian until 1969, some years after the publication of Tronti's 'Factory and Society' (1962), where the social factory concept originates.[2] However, as Patrick Murray observes, Part Three, 'The Production of Absolute Surplus Value', and Part Four, 'The Production of Relative Surplus Value', of *Capital, Vol.1*, which were central to Tronti's analysis in 'Factory and Society', correspond to the concepts of formal and real subsumption respectively.[3] A thematic conception of subsumption is thus clearly evident in the social factory thesis and this is later more explicitly drawn out by Antonio Negri, whose use of the concept in the early 1970s is intimately related to the concept of real subsumption.[4] The social factory concept also corresponds with real subsumption in that it likewise frames the immediate process of production as the 'immediate unity of labour process and valorisation process'.[5] In 'Factory and Society', Tronti opens the discussion with an analysis of what he calls 'Section III of *Capital*', which corresponds to Part Three, Chapter 7 of *Capital, Volume 1,* in English translation, 'The Labour Process and the Valorisation Process'.

> Capital is able to capture, in its own way, the *unity* of the labour process with the process of valorisation; and captures it in an ever greater manner the more that capitalist production develops and the more that the capitalist form of production grasps all the other spheres of society, invading the whole network of social relations.[6]

This quote quite precisely shows how the concept of the social factory was developed on the basis of a thematic conception of

real subsumption. What concerns me here, however, is how the development of the social factory thesis might be characterised as a false totalisation; a term that members of the *Endnotes* group apply to Théorie Communiste's periodising conception of real subsumption, and in other ways to Antonio Negri's mercurial and hyperbolic theories of the social factory and the socialised worker (the latter term was also influenced by the foundational work of Mario Tronti).[7] On the other hand, the concept of the social factory resonated productively with those groups such as Lotta Continua – operating at the intersection of the factory, the university and the metropolis – and Italian Marxist feminists at the point of social reproduction, suggesting it's heuristic potential beyond the frame of classical workerism. If we accept that Marx's conception of real subsumption refers to the production of surplus value in the direct process of production,[8] then several questions might be posed with regard to the social factory thesis: is the direct process of production really woven through the entire web of social relations as Tronti suggested? What is the scope of the direct process of production? What has changed since Marx's analysis in 'The Results of the Immediate Process of Production'? And what do these changes mean for defining subsumption? I explore these questions here by examining the differentiated spatial configurations of real subsumption and the limits of the social factory concept.

A better understanding of the social factory thesis, I would contend, has been impeded because the questions of urbanisation, transport and communications (as processes that modify the relations and forces of production) remained under theorised within *operaismo*, post-*operaismo* and feminist currents of Italian autonomy. This position is explored here through a rethinking of the workerist concepts of the planner state and class composition in terms of *spatial composition* and Henri Lefebvre's notion of the 'state mode of production' (SMP), wherein the rational production and occupation of space, and the integration of spatial planning with production, was viewed as the 'secret' of state order in the

20th century. With an understanding of spatial production as a privileged instrument in accumulation strategies and the determination of the reproduction of the social relations of production, Lefebvre's late 1960s contention that urbanisation was supplanting industrialisation in much of Western Europe was met in the early 1970s with accusations of spatial fetishism by leading urban theorists of the time, including David Harvey and Manual Castells. Yet, seen in the light of nearly fifty years of industrial decline and the contemporary centring of land, urbanisation and housing in multiple national political economies, Lefebvre's then speculative thesis appears increasingly resonant today.

Considering Lefebvre's conception of the SMP alongside theories of the social factory and the planner state, as formulated in different ways by Raniero Panzieri, Tronti and Manfredo Tafuri (the latter conceiving the production of the city as a prefiguration and naturalisation of modern production processes in capitalism), I seek here to articulate the differentiated spatialities of subsumption and the potential for political recomposition therein. I borrow the term *differentiated subsumption* from Vincent Chanson, Alexis Cukier and Frédéric Monferrand, for whom real subsumption amounts neither to total homogenisation nor the universalisation of proletarian experience, but rather to a differentiation of the antagonistic forms that mediate the capital/labour contradiction.[9] Developing this interpretation spatially, I take differentiated subsumption to mean the unitary yet differentiated relation between production, circulation, distribution and consumption, calling into question the *de facto* privileging and isolation of the factory within *operaismo* This differentiated conception can help ground subsumption within the extruded spatial configurations involved in the production of space, bringing attention to urbanisation, transport, communications and infrastructure as direct and indirect nodes of productive capital accumulation. At the same time, it points to the limits of a periodising conception of subsumption by stressing the coexistence and simultaneity of real, formal and

hybrid or intermediate forms of subsumption (the latter including forms of direct coercion not mediated by formal subsumption).[10]

With reference to the cycle of Italian struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, Chanson et al. argue that those following Tronti's theorisation of antagonism and real subsumption within *operaismo* and post-*operaismo* faced the following alternative: either radicalise the social factory thesis so that abstract labour is assumed to encompass *all* social practices, or elaborate a differentiated concept of real subsumption in order to grasp the various segmentations that hierarchically divide the working class. If the first path leads ultimately to false totalisation, a spatialised understanding of subsumption generates a more refined articulation of real subsumption across the social terrain.

The Temporality of the Factory-Society Relationship

The social factory thesis, without being named as such, originated in Tronti's 'Factory and Society' and 'Social Capital' (or, 'The Plan of Capital')[11] in the first and second issues of the *Quaderni Rossi* journal, where Tronti posed the extension of real subsumption across the entirety of social relations. Immediately, the threat of false totalisation is evident as Tronti's description of real subsumption slips from production at 'the highest level of capitalist development' to one of subsumption across the 'whole of society', thus moving from a characteristically unilinear workerist reading of industrial production to a totalising one:

> At the highest level of capitalist development, the social relation is transformed into a moment of the relation of production, the whole of society is turned into an articulation of production, that is, the whole of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination to the whole of society.[12]

Tronti viewed the expansion of real subsumption and developed social capital as a 'tendency' in formation, using this

understanding of the enlarged organic composition of capital to argue that labour-power should understand itself as the 'material action of the dissolution of capital implanted in the decisive point of its system'.[13] The 'tendency', as an anticipatory mode of materialist thinking that seeks to identify latent trends and potentialities in the changing technical composition of capital, was influential within *operaismo,* where it was intimately related to crisis and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. At its best, tendential thinking is closely associated with compositionist analysis, operating as an 'adventure of reason', concerned with comprehending the material basis for mass militant organisation within shifting yet determinate historical social relations. At its worst, it becomes a bad dialectic: a rather 'mechanistic theory of catastrophe' which contends that the objective mechanisms of capitalist development inevitably lead to capital's internal self-annihilation.[14] Massimiliano Tomba, amongst others, has also associated the tendency with a stageist, linear conception of history that fails to recognise the constitutive heterogeneity of living labour within a mosaic of historical temporalities and forms of exploitation.[15]

Tronti's vaunted 'Copernican inversion' of the capital-labour relation rests on a tendential characterisation of labour-power's immanent and contradictory position as a determining part of capital within a production process identified as the most developed form of real subsumption. However, as Anthony Iles notes in this volume, the category of subsumption is useful for distinguishing what is inside, or outside, of productive capitalist relations, rather than assuming a hegemonic, periodised form of subsumption. As Andrés Saenz De Sicilia further notes, a critical conception of subsumption 'points beyond the coherence and completeness of a closed totality, instead identifying the point of tension and antagonism between heterogeneous levels or orders of actuality'.[16] Yet, Tronti's all-encompassing view of real subsumption, involving not only the immediate process of production but the entirety of social relations (albeit with production remaining the determinate point of departure), is never clearly

defined despite the grandeur of its totalising claims. In 'Factory and Society', a spatial understanding of the 'whole process of circulation' is implied by Tronti's emphasis on a differentiated yet unitary relation between production, circulation, distribution and consumption, but we are presented instead with a homogenous, undifferentiated conception of social relations that leaves little room for explicating sectoral or experiential differences within the working class:

> In the social relation of capitalist production, the generalization of production expresses itself as the hypostatization of society. When specifically capitalist production has already weaved the whole web of social relations, it itself emerges as a generic social relation.[17]

In 'Social Capital', Tronti's analysis of social capital (wherein the metamorphoses of individual capitals are characterised as but one term in the total movement of social capital) rests on Marx's distinction between the immediate production process of capital and the total process of its reproduction within the total circuit of capital, as outlined in the Introduction to Part Three of *Volume 2* of *Capital*. The process of labour and valorisation on the one hand; and on the other, the processes of productive consumption and individual consumption. Social capital, then, encompasses 'the reproduction (i.e. maintenance) of the capitalist class and the working class, and thus the reproduction of the capitalist character of the entire process of production'.[18] For Harry Cleaver, Tronti's focus on the reproduction of the classes showed how the simple equation of capital solely with the factory or the immediate process of production was inadequate, since it failed to address how the reproduction of capital also necessitates both reproductive work in the home/community and the accumulation of a reserve army of labour.[19] Consequently, Cleaver argued, the working class, and the social factory, should be redefined to include the 'reserve army as well as the active army, of those who worked at

reproducing the class as well as those who produced other commodities (besides labour-power)'.[20]

But while indirect forms of production and reproduction play a necessary role in processes of capital accumulation, it is not clear that these processes can be considered within a framework of real subsumption. As Endnotes observe, the constant revolutionising of production by way of real subsumption clearly entails dramatic transformations beyond the immediate process of production. But these changes do not necessarily constitute an aspect of real subsumption itself. The question is whether such changes occur *with* or *as a result of* real subsumption.[21] Failing to satisfy the criteria of real subsumption is of course by no means a failure to satisfy the criteria of political relevance, and whether this means that the question of subsumption has explanatory limits or not is a question I will return to in the conclusion. Notwithstanding this discussion, as Steve Wright notes, the centrality that *operaismo* gave to productive labour in the immediate production process severely restricted testing the social factory hypotheses on the grounds of class recomposition beyond the factory walls. A better understanding of what Giovanni Bossi called 'the capitalist use of the articulation of territory', he argues, would have required an analysis of circulation and reproduction that was never fully developed within *operaismo,* and so the problems of housing, health, transport and social life in workers' experience lay largely outside the purview of analysis.[22] Negri embodies such contradictions more than most. In 1979, he could argue, on the one hand, that the theorists of *operaismo* were able to articulate the productive nature of socially mediated labour in its entirety, and on the other hand, that 'our mass worker smelt badly of the Putilov works'.[23]

Tronti's conception of the social productive forces, moreover, only refers to abstract labour and socially necessary labour time and not to 'socially necessary turnover time'; a term that Harvey employs with reference to the pivotal *productive* role that circulation and distribution play in the valorisation process.[24]

Grasping capital as value-in-motion allows for more focus on how fixed capital operates across the wider terrain of society in its productive, circulatory and reproductive movement. This prompts a broader materialist reading of the production process to include, for instance, transport, infrastructure and the built environment as key components in both the production and reproduction of capital and of classes. The heuristic and political potential of the social factory thesis in this regard lay largely beyond *operaismo*'s preoccupations at the time, though one exception is Sergio Bologna. In his brief historiography of FIAT and the factory-society relationship, written for *Primo Maggio* in 1974, he recalls how the social factory thesis promised to dissolve distinctions in leftist Italian political thought between economic and political spheres, and the state and collective capitalist, inherited from Gramsci and the concept of hegemony:

> [T]he machinery of the political state tends increasingly to become one and the same with the figure of the collective capitalist, becomes increasingly the property of the capitalist mode of production and thus a function of the capitalist. The process of composition of capitalist society as a unified whole, a process imposed by the specific developmental course of capitalist production, no longer tolerates the existence of a political terrain which is even formally independent of the network of social relations.[25]

But if *Quaderni Rossi* 'hurled the concept of hegemony under the stamping presses of FIAT-Mirafiori',[26] the category of subsumption and of socio-spatial differentiation was similarly flattened. Notably, for Bologna, the social factory as an index of the factory-society relationship was firmly tied to Turin which exemplified the absorption of the political-geographical terrain within the relations of production. Turin was the only truly 'Americanised' place in Italy, Bologna would say, riffing on Gramsci's 'Americanism and Fordism'. Moreover, the question

of the state as collective capitalist provoked studies within Italian historiography which revealed fascism's long term imbrication with the world market, challenging orthodox leftist views that fascism was economically 'backward'. This understanding, Bologna notes, was brought out further by readings of Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910), published in Italy in 1961, which showed that the relationship between state, credit and industry was far from anomalous in the normal functioning of Italian and other national capital's and that industrial concentration – the alpha and omega of the social factory thesis – was only one part of 'the tendency'. Moreover, the equation of the factory-city with 'Americanism and Fordism' in the 1960s was further called into question by black urban revolts in the America cities, the US student movement and anti-Vietnam War protests, disrupting schematic conceptions of the mass worker as *the* revolutionary metropolitan subject. As Bologna glosses it:

> Where were we to put them, these students? Damn! All our shelves of historical and sociological categories were thrown into turmoil. A disaster![27]

For Bologna, *Quaderni Rossi*'s concept of the factory was so 'totalitarian' as to absorb all other levels of politics. Moreover, even where the social factory concept was seemingly more applicable, as in Turin, the theorists of *operaismo* continued to depict the factory city as 'American' (read: 'advanced') when the American factory-city was already being superseded as restructuring and the recomposition of capital gathered pace in the 1970s. Even in Turin, the flight and fragmentation of FIAT across Italy was already rendering any simple reduction of general social relations to factory relations as 'deformations' that failed to recognise the multiplicity of job profiles in places like Milan, as well as the movements that sought to unite the industrial working class with diffuse struggles across the whole territory.[28] Bologna's seminal article from 1977, 'The Tribe of Moles', articulates the

contradictions of this period very well, but before examining that text in more detail I want to consider how Lefebvre might provide a more spatialised understanding of the links between planning and the differentiated geographies of subsumption.

The Planner State and the State Mode of Production: Factory and Beyond

> Hence, the development of capitalist planning is something closely related to that of the capitalist use of machines. To the development of cooperation, of the social labour process, there corresponds under capitalist management the development of the plan as despotism.
> – Raniero Panzieri[29]

> The spatial arrangement of a city, a region, a nation, or a continent increases productive forces, just as do the equipment and machines in a factory or in a business, but at another level. One uses space just as one uses a machine.
> – Henri Lefebvre[30]

While there is little evidence to suggest that Henri Lefebvre had any direct relationship with Italian *operaismo,* his critique of the 'state mode of production' (SMP) closely parallels the critique of the 'planner state' within Italian workerist currents. The critique of the 'the plan' or planner state was central to *operaismo* with Tronti and Panzieri providing a theoretical basis for this position. In particular, Panzieri's principal contributions lay in demystifying capitalist machinery and technological rationality as a pseudo-neutral, pseudo-objective form of capitalist domination, and in characterising planning within capitalism as the despotic organisation of cooperation for surplus-value extraction. As Chanson *et al* observe, for Panzieri, 'the main vector of real subsumption precisely is planification'.[31] If *operaismo* could be interpreted as a form of accelerationism in some of its more

hyperbolic guises, this interpretation does not arise from a reading of Panzieri. He argued that the growth of constant capital is always at the expense, in the long run, of variable capital and that granting capitalist planning and rationality a free hand in the production process was a strategic and political error:

> The relationship between these developments and the processes and contradictions of contemporary capitalism (its quest for ever more complex means to accomplish and impose its planning), or the concrete historical reality in which the working-class movement finds itself living and fighting (the daily 'capitalist use' of machinery and organisation), these are ignored in favour of a technologic-idyllic image.[32]

While Marx had grasped the 'purely despotic' role of capitalist planning in the production of surplus-value, Panzieri argued that Lenin had been unable to entertain the possibility that capitalist social relations may be present in social planning.[33] Treating science and technique as socially neutral forces and allowing the repetition of capitalist forms in the relations of production both at the factory level and at the level of overall social production, allowed productivism and the incorporation of labour to proceed at pace in Italy, just as it had done in the Soviet Union:

> Capital's planning mechanism tends to extend and perfect its despotic nature during the course of capital's development. For it has to control a growing mass of labour-power with the concomitant increase of workers resistance while the augmented means of production require a higher degree of integration of the living raw material.[34]

Panzieri's insights were developed by Antonio Negri in an influential 1968 essay on John Maynard Keynes.[35] Following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, he argued, the capitalist class was forced to recognise working class demands as a necessary feature that the

state would have to accommodate. According to Negri, the 'genius' of Keynes, beginning in 1929, was to advocate the need for state intervention to mediate class conflict and guarantee economic equilibrium by including the working class in capital's plans:

> [H]ow to recognise the political emergence of the working class, while finding new means (through a complete restructuring of the social mechanism for the extraction of surplus value) of politically controlling this new class within the workings of the system. The admission of working class autonomy had to be accompanied by the ability to control it politically.[36]

The material basis of this control was 'the state as planner', legitimising the requirements of capital through what Negri termed the 'technological path of repression'.[37] However, for Negri, as for Tronti and Panzieri, grasping this class relation within the transformation of capital and state allowed for the famed 'Copernican inversion' of *operaismo*: integrating the antagonism of workers within the production process, capital would thenceforth have to contend with the working class as a driver of development and its recomposition at a higher level of massification and socialisation.

The demystification of capitalist planning revealed the inherently political and antagonistic character of the social relations of production, hence Tronti's advocation of 'the strategy of refusal' and the 'struggle against labour'. But if the notion of capitalist planning exceeds the realm of the factory, this premise of the social factory is once again poorly articulated within *operaismo*. Panzieri does suggest 'the progressive extension of planning from the factory to the market, to the external social sphere' under capitalist relations.[38] He also conjectures that with generalised planning, 'capital extends the fundamental mystified form of the law of surplus-value from the factory to the entire society'.[39] But there is little concrete discussion of how and where capitalist planning is embedded in the wider social sphere in the form of fixed capital

as part of a wider productive circulation process. Working through a similar conception of state planning, via the concept of the state mode of production, Lefebvre provides a more nuanced notion of the geographies and infrastructures of capitalist planning.

In *The Survival of Capitalism* (1973) Lefebvre posed the rhetorical question: how does capitalism survive and continue to produce and reproduce new capitalist spaces? His initial response was: '*by occupying a space, by producing a space'*.[40] But if the production of space, or the urbanisation of capital, is said to be central to the survival of capitalism, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden have argued that this insight is given more substantiation by Lefebvre in his writings on the state in the late-1970s, especially in the four-volume *De l'État* (1976–1978), which is yet to be published in entirety in English. For Brenner and Elden, the response that comes through in Lefebvre's writings on the state in this period is that the 'state mode of production' (SMP) is *the* link between the survival of capitalism and the production of space.[41] The rational production and occupation of space, Lefebvre argued, increasingly became the secret of state order in the latter half of the 20th century, with the state's unrivalled ability to channel large-scale investments into the built environment – aligned with the legal capacity to plan and regulate these investments – giving it a unique position in the production and reproduction of new capitalist spaces:

> Space: how practical [*Quelle aubaine, l'espace*]! It may be sold and bought. It expands the realm of the commodity. At the same time, it permits the social forces that would otherwise resist established power to be controlled. And so the state mode of production is inaugurated.[42]

As Alberto Toscano observes, deploying Lefebvre with reference to contemporary logistical conflicts, such struggles not only challenge value-in-motion but capitalist power in the guise of the logistical state.[43] As a consequence of the SMP, Lefebvre argued,

'the planning of the modern economy tends to become spatial planning', and the successive production of abstract space – involving the built environment and extensive networks of banks, businesses, communication, exchange and transport – is increasingly utilised to produce surplus-value.[44] Drawing on *Volume 2* of *Capital*, wherein transport and communication are included as part of *productive* capital,[45] he observes how '[t]he urban fabric, with its multiple networks of communication and exchange is part of the means of production. The city and its various installations (ports, trains stations, etc.) are part of capital.'[46]

For Lefebvre, spatial production imbues space with economic functions and helps determine the reproduction of the social relations of production. The spatial arrangement of territory at all scales (involving fixed capital writ large), he argued, is central to increasing and enhancing productive and reproductive forces: 'in the current mode of production, social space is considered among the *productive forces and the means of production, among the social relations of production and, especially, their reproduction*'.[47] As such, he said, we have passed 'from the production of things in space to the production of space itself',[48] thus moving beyond notions of space as merely a container for production in order to understand space as a product in its own right:

> Space is no longer only an indifferent medium, the sum of places where surplus value is created, realized and distributed. It becomes the product of social labour, the very general object of production, and consequently of the formation of surplus value. This is how production becomes social within the very framework of neocapitalism.[49]

This formulation, grasped within Lefebvre's wider analysis of a developing shift from industrialisation to urbanisation, provides a more compelling definition of the differentiated real subsumption than anything *operaismo* mustered. As Lefebvre contends, 'the (unforeseen) path of the socialization of productive forces' was the production of

space. Capital 'found new inspiration in the conquest of space – in trivial terms, in real estate speculation, capital projects (inside and outside the city), the buying and selling of space. And it did so on a worldwide scale'.[50] Whether, this process was unforeseen or simply under-acknowledged, this differentiated spatialised conception of the extruded social factory was largely elided by Italian workerists in the classical phase of *operaismo*. Given the scale of migration to urban centres within Italy and the escalating socio-economic problems associated with urbanisation, overcrowding and slum housing in the post-war period it is difficult not to conclude that a certain amount of factory fetishism was at large within *operaismo*.[51]

In contrast to *operaismo*, Lefebvre's broader understanding of urbanisation was premised on his conception of a 'capital switching' tendency from the crisis-ridden primary sector of industry and manufacturing to the secondary sector of land, real estate, housing and the built environment (to which Italy was by no means excluded, as I will show in the final section of this essay). As early as 1970, Lefebvre was able to grasp these incipient urban-economic developments in an extraordinarily prescient manner, noting in *Reflections on the Politics of Space*, for instance, that the mobilisation of rent and real estate wealth must be understood as 'one of the great extensions of finance capital within recent years; the entry of the construction sector into the industrial, banking, and financial circuit has been one of the strategic objectives of the last decade'.[52] If real estate was traditionally a secondary circuit, Lefebvre argued that it was now embedding itself substantially within the production-consumption circuit. In a pivotal section of *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre explains how speculation and construction in the secondary circuit serves for capitalism as a crucial 'buffer' in times of industrial slowdown and economic depression and how real estate can even become the primary sector in the formation of capital:

> As the percentage of overall surplus value formed and realized by industry begins to decline, the percentage created and

> realized by real-estate speculation and construction increases. The second circuit supplants the first, becomes essential.[53]

The proposition that the second sector *supplants* the first is overstated here and better viewed as tendency, yet it is a tendency that has evidentially become more tangible in the intervening years. At the same time, it is worth asking how much actual capital switching is required when the primary circuit has already been so thoroughly divested and when financialisation and rent-seeking are so interconnected with the production of space, irrespective of conditions in the primary circuit.[54] As Brett Christophers notes in *The New Enclosure*, land accounted for 51 percent of the UK's net asset worth in 2016 (from an estimated 2 percent in the 1930s), with property following closely as a dominant asset.[55] At a global level, real estate accounts for 60 percent of the world's assets, with roughly 75 percent of that figure tied up in housing.[56] But as Lefebvre stressed, bringing the notion of crisis to bear on capital switching, it has long been understood that overinvestment in real estate is an 'unhealthy situation' for productive capital.[57] There are few multipliers (such as ancillary industries in the case of manufacturing);[58] initial investments are typically not conducive to further surplus-value generation; capital tends to become 'fixed' in real estate, making capital illiquid; the rentier economy begins to supersede productive investment, generating wealth disparities, social conflict and problems of effective demand.[59] Moreover, as multiple urban crises since the 1970s have shown, investment in the built environment is highly sensitive to drastic forms of devaluation.

What Lefebvre's notion of spatial production provides is a framework for a differentiated conception of subsumption, involving urbanisation, transport, communications and infrastructure as direct and indirect nodes of productive capital accumulation. At the same time, he notes that capital switching is also crisis switching, pointing to the limits of urbanisation as a response to declining profits in productive investment. On a political level, as Chris

O' Kane, observes, Lefebvre's conception of abstract space is always internally countered by the promise of differential space, avoiding the perils of periodisation, totalisation and depoliticisation in other accounts of successive concrete abstraction.[60] These issues are posed in different ways when considering the work of Manfredo Tafuri, whose critique of the factory city has often been considered pessimistic and totalising.

The City as Fixed Capital: Tafuri, *Operaismo* and Architecture

Besides his position as architectural historian, critic and theorist, Tafuri was an editor for and contributor to the *operaist* journal *Contropiano* (1968–1971), working closely with Tronti, Alberto al Rosa, Massimo Cacciari, Rita di Leo, and for one issue, Antonio Negri.[61] Drawing on this intellectual lineage, in *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development,* first published in 1973, Tafuri questioned the meaning of architecture in two substantive areas: firstly, architecture as an ideological institution; secondly, the role of architecture as a prefiguration and naturalisation of modern urban production processes within capitalist relations.[62] *Contropiano* explicitly appropriated the workerist slogan 'contro il piano' ('against the plan'), and the critique of 'The Plan of Capital' (the alternative title to Tronti's 'Social Capital') was central to Tafuri's critical understanding of the increasing integration of production with consumption via the welfare state, regional planning and urban design.[63] Challenging the social democratic culture that sought to retain the 'good' side of this development while rejecting it's 'bad' side, Tafuri assailed the 'operative criticism' that was written to legitimise and naturalise modern architecture and its development, instead he foregrounded the radical disjuncture between capital's need for urban growth and purportedly progressive architectural practice.[64] The more architectural practice and criticism advanced radical formal experimentation, the more it contributed to new cycles of capitalist urban development or took on the role of reformer in the guise

of 'form as regressive utopia'.[65] Just as Negri argued that Keynes' project was premised on incorporating the negative side of capital relations – e.g. variable capital as class struggle – within capitalist development, and just as Lefebvre saw the consolidation of the SMP and state productivism as the ideological thread that united all parliamentary political models from fascism to democratic socialism since the 1930s, so Tafuri saw the integration of socialism and capitalism in industrial planning in Italy. His 'Project of Crisis' registered how bourgeois architects and intellectuals mediated acceptance of the thoroughly irrational development of capitalist urbanism while simultaneously helping transform the working class into a positive realisation (for capital) of a potentially troubling dialectic: 'No longer Hegel, but Keynes' as Tafuri glosses it.[66]

To rehistoricise the relationship between critique and the forms and processes that structure intellectual thinking, what Tafuri thought necessary was a will to negative critique against a graveyard of good intentions underwritten by the structuring coordinates of capitalist development. Defining the city as a 'productive mechanism of new forms of economic accumulation', he showed how architecture's dependence on production and finance ensured that it was inevitably subject to instrumentalisation and incorporation, ideologically and practically integrating urban design with the reorganisation of production, distribution and consumption and ultimately surrendering to an alienating *'politics of things'*.[68] When the ideology of productive work is part of the production and organisation of a comprehensive urban plan, he argued, the city becomes objectively structured like a '*capitalistic-industrial-utopia*',[69] a social factory. With Corbusier, he observed, architecture was united with production and consumption, giving rise to a profoundly non-revolutionary utopia: 'Architecture (read: programming and planned reorganisation of building production and of the city as a productive organism) rather than revolution. Le Corbusier clearly enunciated this alternative'.[70] With Ludwig Hilberseimer and the notion of the

'city-machine', developed in 1927, the entire modern metropolis was defined as a unified organisational assemblage to be managed by the architect:

> It was no longer a question of giving form to single elements, nor even to simple prototypes. The real unity of the production cycle having been identified in the city, the only suitable role for the architect was the organiser of that cycle.[71]

As the gap widened between the institutions that control the dynamics of the plan and those that realise it, Tafuri went beyond what Lefebvre called 'the fragmentary sciences' to argue:

> [J]ust as there cannot exist a class political economy, but only a class criticism of political economy, so too there cannot be founded a class aesthetic, art, or architecture, but only a class criticism of the aesthetic, of art, of architecture, of the city itself.[72]

Following Tafuri's rebuttal of progressive reformism, Archizoom's 'No-Stop City' (1969–71) and 'Extruded City' (1964) projects, likewise questioned architecture's faith in liberation through technological development. In the latter project, Archizoom imagined a vast urban agglomeration between Florence and nearby Prato as an extruded social factory; a coherent architectural system functioning as a 'transmission belt' encompassing all the productive, administrative and social functions of the entire region.[73] In the former, replicating and simultaneously over-identifying with Hilberseimer's unsentimental vision of the city-as-fixed-capital, 'No-Stop City' exaggerated the productive city *ad absurdum*, feverishly dreaming the 'total urbanisation of the world'.[74] On a representational level, the 'No-Stop City' project's overidentification with capitalist development aimed to reveal architecture's primary developmental function, suggesting a potential practice beyond the technical-economic realpolitik of

things as they are. But Tafuri himself was wary of this 'utopian linkage of aesthetic absolutism to the work of politics' and its failure to yoke subjective utopian will to any real movement that might materially abolish the present state of things.[75]

If Archizoom's representation of the 'city-as-fixed-capital' replicated the tendency of *operaismo*-influenced thinkers to hypostatise the conditions of the highest cycles of Italian industry to all of social reality, Tafuri has also been accused of reproducing such a totalising vision. However, Gail Day argues that we should see his work in the light of 'critical solidarity', pointing to his nuanced, critical investigations of the social democratic mass housing projects of Amsterdam, Red Vienna and Weimar Germany from the late 1910s to the 1930s, the Italian centre-left's planning programmes of the 1950s and 1960s and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) Eurocommunist showpiece, 'Red Bologna'.[76] For Tafuri, the problem with Red Bologna, as for Weimar Germany and Red Vienna, was not so much that 'nothing is possible' under totalising capital relations (as his interlocutors, including Fredric Jameson, would claim he argued) but that political power is not economic power, and that the former (realised in terms of architecture and mass housing projects) would inevitably be subject to the latter when reduced to utopian enclave.[77] The point for Tafuri, the 'harsh *and* sympathetic' critic, was to confront the limitations of the planner, the architect, the avant-garde and the leftist governmental authority, when circumscribed by a relative isolation from the social struggle of base movements.[78] Such struggle became increasingly evident in the collective material praxis of what Bologna termed the 'territorial community activism' of 1970s Italy, to which I now turn.[79]

Capital Switching and the Phantom Factory

> 'To change life', 'to change society', these phrases mean nothing if there is not production of an appropriated space. – Henri Lefebvre.[80]

A differentiated and non-totalising understanding of real subsumption, or the social factory as a representation of such relations, requires thinking through the production of space. Sergio Bologna's 'The Tribe of Moles' provides one window onto these questions in 1970s Italy. For Bologna, always more attentive to decomposition than many of his comrades, the restructuring of capital in this period was a response to the worldwide monetary crisis and rising workers' demands. The specific relations he outlines between industrial decline, monetary crisis, the planner state and the property market closely parallel the 'capital switching' thesis outlined by Lefebvre and other critical geographers.[81] The restructuring of Italian capital, he observes, entailed significant reinvestment in lucrative internal land and property markets, with the built environment becoming the 'first refuge' for petrodollars, real estate investment trusts, insurance companies, pension funds and all kinds of speculative activity.[82] Between 1971 and 1974, Bologna notes, land and land development loans tripled; commercial bank credits to real estate investment trusts and mortgage companies doubled; and state-backed credit institutions provided twice as much investment for the housing sector as they did for the entire service sector.

In the face of widespread worker recalcitrance and declining industrial profit margins, the use of public and private capital for financial speculation in housing construction and real estate 'appropriated vast sums which could not advantageously be invested in production'.[83] The PCI was central to this tendency, as Bologna observes, since the property interest was dependent on the 'party system' for land: the PCI and the DC commanded vast tracts of real estate through planning controls that the construction companies, who bore the financial power, required to initiate and direct the dynamics of development. Land bargaining, via pay-offs and the granting of planning permissions, thus facilitated capital diversification, with the construction cycle now functioning as 'a pump to drain away income from workers and redistribute it to the middle classes on the one hand, and to the

"construction interest" on the other'.[84] Prefiguring contemporary discussions around liquidity and financialisation in the built environment, Bologna observes how specific financial structures were created by the state to make capital more fungible. If city centres had previously operated as zones for the 'petrification of capital', they were now subject to a series of crisis-derived speculative vehicles which accelerated the transfer of property deeds and gave 'a considerable impulse to the velocity of circulation of money, without it passing through a process of production'.[85]

If the credit industry and the rentier economy expanded significantly in the 1970s, the directly productive side of urbanisation in Italy's post-war housing reform had been marked not only by rampant land-speculation but also profit-laden construction dynamics: building costs tripled in the decade from 1953; construction sector growth ran at 12.1 percent annually compared to 8.2 percent in industry; 400,000–500,000 were employed in the construction and transportation sectors compared to 120,000 industrial jobs in the same period.[86] In the post-war period, housing construction accounted for as much as 25–30 percent of total fixed capital investment in Italy, a significantly higher ratio than more industrialised countries in Europe.[87] Land control was essential for planning and development, serving as instrument of both production and consumption and helping to absorb a potentially recalcitrant surplus labour force in unregulated, marginal and precarious work.[88] Between 1950 and 1967, seventeen million Italians moved from one district to another, especially from rural to urban areas and from South to North, placing enormous pressure on existing urban infrastructure and centring the construction industry in Italian political economy.[89] By 1971, overcrowding was endemic, shanty towns spread throughout the large industrial cities, and rents consumed up to 40 percent of wages in parallel with steep inflationary rises in the cost of living.[90] The main state housing agency, GESCAL, did little to mediate this situation: Italy held only 7–8 percent of state-built housing as a percentage of overall housing stock in 1977, while Belgium, Great Britain,

France and Holland ranged from 45 percent to 75 percent.[91] It is in this context that Bologna argued that proletarian struggles for the 'reconquest of the city centres' should be understood as 'starting from city planning as a space of intervention in class dynamics'.[92]

Arguing in 1977 that political recomposition must begin from a base of dis-homogeneity, including hitherto marginalised sections of the working class, such as women, migrants, the low-waged and the unemployed, Bologna saw the emergence of autonomist feminism in 1970–71 as a decisive event in the transformation of movement praxis, opening up the entire area of social reproduction as an urgent political arena. As Cleaver observes, the autonomist feminist movement 'grasped not only the theoretical concept of the social factory but also the key role of the struggle of non-factory workers.'[93] Yet the material context of rapid urbanisation and real estate development is too rarely invoked in the contemporary historiography of the 'Wages Against Housework' era, even if massive capital switching from industry to the built environment placed enormous pressure on the sphere of social reproduction. This is a research project that requires more development in order to provide a necessary theoretical and practical linkage between social reproduction, consumption and a materialist politics of abstract urban space.

If, as Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James contend, the question of housework forced the trade unions to acknowledge that they dealt '(a) only with the factory; (b) only with a measured and "paid" work day; (c) only with that side of wages which is given to us and not with the side of wages which is taken back, that is inflation',[94] then it might also have forced them to acknowledge, as Bruno Ramirez observes: 'the importance of the home as a unit of production, and housewives as protagonists of the struggle against capitalist planning in this sphere'.[95] Time (read: labour time) has typically dominated space as a frame of reference in domestic debates around the sphere of social reproduction. But, as Maya Gonzalez argues, with reference to post-war suburbanisation in the US, the spatiality of capital weighed heavily on the

post-war household as increasingly 'the reproduction of the working class and the reproduction of capital came to fold in on one another' in the form of the housing commodity, de-differentiating what had become separated in previous cycles of accumulation.[96] With this movement, the historical split between production and reproduction in the sexual division of labour was sutured and social relations and everyday life became increasingly integrated in the logic of the reproduction of capitalist relations. As the home became both 'the commodity which physically contained all the others' and the worker's main asset, and as the need for consumer durables grew alongside the growth of women's labour in the workplace (the same consumer durables that were so central to economic growth in this period partially took the place of women's labour in the household), the expanded reproduction of capitalist relations was all the more thoroughly cemented.[97]

As Alberto Battaggia observes, the milieu of Italian autonomy in the period of the mass worker was based on 'an objective relation to the form of production and a resulting homogeneity of behaviours and political objectives'.[98] The urban struggles and movements of the 1970s based their praxis on the new spatial composition arising from land and property as increasingly central pivots of credit-laden, interest bearing capital accumulation.[99] If some saw an immanent 'socialization of class conflict, extending outwards from the factory to the whole society' in Turin (including large-scale infrastructure projects and new towns to accommodate workers), even in Italy's premier 'factory-city' urban-industrial restructuring was already rendering real subsumption as highly differentiated and non-totalising.[100] The problems of housing, unemployment, welfare, transport and services were just as pressing as the labour problem in the workplace. Indeed, in most Italian cities in the mid-1970s, the context was not the successive abstraction of life under real subsumption (as in the social factory thesis), but economic crisis, austerity, mass unemployment and crippling inflation at the level of consumption. In short, the externalisation of a *crisis of productive capital* (or

the dissolution of real subsumption as the union of labour process and the valorisation process) onto the working class, rather than the extension of real subsumption across the entire social terrain.

The widespread autoreduction struggles in areas of social consumption such as transport, utilities, leisure and housing cannot be described as struggles over wage labour and real subsumption *per se* but must be understood as part of a wider struggle '*for the re-appropriation of social wealth produced by the working class but unpaid by capital*'.[101] As members of the Endnotes discussion group observe, the increasing extension of the exchange relation beyond the immediate process of production does not necessarily constitute an aspect of real subsumption itself but rather might better be understood *as a result* of real subsumption, and in this case its dissolution.[102] The primary material context for the escalation of urban struggles and autoreduction struggles in 1970s Italy was a crisis of productive capital and not an extension of real subsumption across the whole of society as Tronti prophesied. Ultimately, the proposition of the social factory was just as ssubject – as Tronti's idealised, invariable revolutionary proletarian subject – to political-economic restructuring, as Tronti's old comrade Raffaele Sbardella would convincingly argue in the early 1980s.[103]

Conclusion

The real subsumption that Tronti saw everywhere in the 'factory-city' of 1960s Italy turns out to have been a temporally limited, differentiated and dis-homogenous phenomenon and not a totalising one. In 'The Autonomy of the Political', written in 1972, even Tronti would acknowledge that the 'reduction' of the 'entire society to a factory' was inadequate.[104] The tendency to periodise real subsumption, particularly evident in Tronti and Negri's deployment of the social factory thesis, was likewise problematic. As Massimiliano Tomba and others have shown, modes of exploitation found external to real subsumption – such as hybrid or intermediate forms of subsumption that extract value from surplus labour without formal subsumption of labour to

capital – cannot be dismissed as historically residual or regressive, but must be understood as the forms most adequate to the current complex multiverse of capitalist relations of production.[105] Other allegedly residual forms include landed interests and rent, which play crucial and persistent roles in determining the means of production and reproduction, and whose baleful influence has long rebutted predictions of the 'euthanasia of the rentier', from Ricardo to Mill, Marx and Keynes.[106] Bologna's work in the 1970s, discussed above, provides an antidote to *operaismo*'s own brand of industrial accelerationism in this regard.

Subsumption, considered as a relation between constant and variable capital, bears comparison with the autonomist Marxist conception of class composition.[107] But, as Steve Wright observes, the attempt by some within *operaismo* to force class composition into preconceived categories, meant that too much focus was placed on the direct process of production narrowly conceived within the factory and not enough on struggles outside the factory walls and external to the wage-labour relation. Central to this tendency was an unwillingness to address the technical and political decomposition which extinguished the revolutionary subjectivity of the mass worker in the 1970s.[108] The limits of the social factory thesis rest on hypostatising factory conditions to the whole of society *tout court*, thus obliterating any meaningful distinction between what is productive and unproductive for capital. Precisely because this distinction expresses the specific form of the (productive) labour process on which the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and class relations depends, many within *operaismo* were unable to account for the decomposition of the mass worker under tendential conditions of de-industrialisation, urbanisation, financialisation and austerity.

If real subsumption is always 'a dissoluble union of *labour process* and *valorization* process',[109] and if the singular importance of defining capitalist production as such for Marx is to show that 'without the production of surplus-value there can be no capitalist production, and hence no capital and no capitalist!'[110], then

the explanatory power of real subsumption as a concept may be less about grasping the successive abstraction of social relations within capitalism and more about defining the *limits* of real subsumption as a process of concrete abstraction. Decomposition, as much as composition. Just as there is no invariable advancement of proletarian subjectivity within the direct process of production, so there is no invariable advancement of the social factory as a 'transmission belt' of abstract labour. Grasping the *failure* of capitalist production and the inability of capital to incorporate surplus labour within the production process prioritises capitalist crisis as a terrain of inquiry and simultaneously focuses attention on the means by which industrial crisis is transferred to other spheres of social relation and exchange, not least the built environment.

1
Mario Tronti, 'Factory and Society', 1962, available: https://operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com/2013/06/13/factory-and-society/

2
For the publication and translation history of *The Results* see Patrick Murray, 'The Place of "The Results of the Immediate Production Process" in *Capital*', in *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016.

3
Ibid.

4
To my knowledge, the first explicit reference to and theorisation of subsumption within *operaismo* came in Antonio Negri's pamphlet, 'Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organisation' (1971), collected in Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy,* London: Verso, 2005, pp.1–50.

5
Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1*, (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London: Penguin, 1992, p.991.

6
'Factory and Society', op. cit.

7
Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes,* No.2, 'Misery and the Value Form', 2010.

8
Karl Marx, 'The Results of the Immediate Process of Production' in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1*, op. cit.

9
Vincent Chanson, Alexis Cukier and Frédéric Monferrand, 'Subsumption and Antagonism, *operaismo* and Critical Theory: The Missed Encounter that Shaped the Fate of Autonomous Marxism'. Draft transcript of a paper presented at the 2013 Historical Materialism conference in London. Available on Chris O' Kane's blog at: https://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/

10
Massimiliano Tomba, 'Historical

Temporalities of Capital: An Anti-Historicist Perspective', *Historical Materialism*, No.17, 2009, p.63.

11

Mario Tronti, 'Social Capital', 1963, available: https://operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/social-capital/

12

'Factory and Society', op. cit.

13

Ibid.

14

Books for Burning, op. cit., p.27 and p.51.

15

'Historical Temporalities of Capital', op. cit., pp.44–65.

16

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*. (PhD thesis), Kingston University, 2016, available: https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/36138/

17

'Factory and Society', op. cit.

18

Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol.2*, London: Penguin Classics, 1992, p.468.

19

Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979, p.57.

20

Ibid., p.57.

21

'The History of Subsumption', op. cit., pp.148–149.

22

Cited in Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, p.81.

23

Ibid., p.80.

24

David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, London: Verso, 2006, pp.186–188.

25

Sergio Bologna, 'The Factory-Society Relationship as an Historical Category', 1974, available: https://libcom.org/library/factory-society-relationship-historical-category

26

Ibid.

27

Ibid.

28

Ibid.

29

Raniero Panzieri, 'The Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx Versus the Objectivists', 1961, available: https://libcom.org/library/capalist-use-machinery-raniero-panzieri

30

'Henri Lefebvre, 'Social Product and Use Value' in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, Eds. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.188.

31

'Subsumption and Antagonism, *operaismo* and Critical Theory', op. cit.

32

'The Capitalist Use of Machinery', op. cit.

33

Raniero Panzieri, 'Surplus Value and Planning: Notes on the Reading of Capital' in *The Labour Process & Class Strategies*, London: Stage 1 for the Conference of Socialist Economists, 1976, p.6.

34

Ibid., p.8.

35

Antonio Negri, 'Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State' (1968) in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Eds.) *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

36

Ibid., p.27.

37

Ibid., p.26.

38

'The Capitalist Use of Machinery', op. cit.

39

'Surplus Value and Planning: Notes on the Reading of Capital', op. cit., p.21.

40

Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1976, p.21.

41
Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.21.

42
'Space and the State', in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays,* op. cit., p.245–246.

43
Alberto Toscano, 'Lineaments of the Logistical State', *Viewpoint Magazine*, September, 2014. https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/09/28/lineaments-of-the-logistical-state/

44
'Space: Social Product and Use Value', op. cit., p.186–187.

45
As Toscano suggests in 'Lineaments of the Logistical State', op. cit. the relationship between production, transport and communication might be characterised as *directly productive circulation*.

46
'Space: Social Product and Use Value', op. cit., p.187.

47
Ibid., p.189.

48
Ibid., p.188.

49
Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p.154–155.

50
Ibid., p.155.

51
Notably, the problems related to the urban process in post-war Italy are well-documented in popular films by leading Italian auteurs, such as *Miracle in Milan* (Dir. Vittorio de Sica, 1951), *Rocco and his Brothers* (Luchino Visconti, 1960) and *Hands over the City* (Dir. Francesco Rosi, 1963). It is not for lack of knowledge that urban issues lay largely outside the purview of *operaismo*.

52
Henri Lefebvre, 'Reflections on the Politics of Space' in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, op. cit., p.177.

53
Ibid, p.159–160.

54
For more analysis of the integral link between urbanisation and financialisation, see Louis Moreno, 'The Urban Process Under Financialised Capitalism', *City*, Vol.18, No.3, 2014.

55
Brett Christophers, *The New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain*, London: Verso, 2018.

56
Samuel Stein, *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*, London: Verso, 2019.

57
The Urban Revolution, op. cit., p.160.

58
Though the production and consumption of consumer durables became an important new commodity market, for instance in the credit-driven US suburbanisation process of the 20th century. See Maya Gonzalez, 'Notes on the New Housing Question', *Endnotes,* No.2, 2010.

59
Credit, of course, has been the major solution to this problem.

60
Chris O'Kane, 'Fetishistic Concrete Abstraction, Social Constitution and Social Domination in Henri Lefebvre's Writings on Everyday Life, Cities and Space', *Capital & Class*, Vol.42, No.2, 2018.

61
Contropiano was conceived as a follow up to the journal *Classe Operaia*.

62
Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, Cambridge: Massachusetts: The MIT Press, (1973) 1976.

63
Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'Intellectual Work and Capitalist Development: Origins and Context of Manfredo Tafuri's Critique of Architectural Ideology', 2011, available: http://thecityasaproject.org/2011/03/pier-vittorio-aureli-manfredo-tafuri/

64
'Intellectual Work and Capitalist Development', op. cit.

65
'Form as Regressive Utopia' is the

title of Chapter Three in *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. The term is otherwise rendered as 'form without utopia' in the Introduction to the same title. op. cit., p.ix.

66
Ibid., p.61.

67
Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1980, p.8.

68
Ibid., p.46-47.

69
Ibid., p.70.

70
Ibid., p.100.

71
Ibid., p.107.

72
Ibid., p.179.

73
Quote from Gilberto Corretti of Archizoom in Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'More Money/Less Work: Archizoom' in Catherine Rossi and Alex Coles (Eds.), *The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968–1976*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013, p.150.

74
Ibid., p.149.

75
David Cunningham and Jon Goodbun, 'Marx, Architecture and Modernity', *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol.11, No.2, 2006, p.177.

76
Gail Day, 'Strategies in the Metropolitan Merz: Manfredo Tafuri and Italian Workerism', *Radical Philosophy*, No.133, Sept/Oct, 2005, p.34–35, available: https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/strategies-in-the-metropolitan-merz

77
Gail Day, 'Manfredo Tafuri, Fredric Jameson and the Contestations of Political Memory', *Historical Materialism*, Vol.20, No.1, pp. 31–77.

78
Ibid., p.35.

79
Sergio Bologna, 'The Tribe of Moles' in Sylvia Lotringer and Christian Marazzi (Eds.), *Autonomia: Post-Political Writings*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007.

80
'Social Product and Use Value', op. cit., p.186.

81
See, *The Urban Revolution*, op. cit; David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Urbanization*, Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University, 1985; Kevin Fox Gotham, 'Creating Liquidity out of Spatial Fixity: The Secondary Circuit of Capital and the Subprime Mortgage Crisis', *International journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.33, No.2, 2009; Brett Christophers, 'Revisiting the Urbanization of Capital', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol.101, No.6, 2011.

82
'The Tribe of Moles', op. cit., p.42.

83
Enzo Mingione, 'Theoretical Elements for a Marxist Analysis of Urban Development' in Michael Harloe (Ed.), *Captive Cities: Studies in the Political Economy of Cities and Regions,* London: John Wiley & Sons, 1977, p.98.

84
'The Tribe of Moles', op. cit., p.42.

85
Ibid., p.42.

86
Ibid, p.54.

87
Nella Ginatempo, 'The Structural Contradictions of the Building Industry in Italy, and the Significance of the New Housing Legislation', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.3, Nos.1–3, 1979.

88
'Theoretical Elements for a Marxist Analysis of Urban Development', op. cit.

89
Ernest Dowson, 'The Italian Background', *Radical America,* Vol.7, No.2, March, April, 1973.

90
'The Italian Background', op. cit.

91
Maurizio Marcelloni, 'Urban Movements and Political Struggles in Italy', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* Vol.3, Nos.1-4, 1979.

92
'The Tribe of Moles', op. cit., p.43.

93
Reading Capital Politically, op. cit., p.59.

94
Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press Ltd., 1972, p.34.

95
Bruno Ramirez, 'Self-Reduction of Prices in Italy', in *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973–1992*, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1992, p.192.

96
Maya Gonzalez, 'Notes on the New Housing Question' in *Endnotes*, No.2, 2010, p.61.

97
Ibid.

98
Alberto Battaggia, 'Mass worker and Social Worker: Reflections on the "New Class Composition"', *Notes from Below*, No.1, 2018, available: https://notesfrombelow.org/article/mass-worker-and-social-worker

99
Neil Gray, 'Beyond the Right to the City: Territorial Autogestion and the Take over the City Movement in 1970s Italy', *Antipode* Vol.50, No.2, 2018.

100
G. Lagana, M. Pianta and A. Segre, 'Urban Social Movements and Urban Restructuring in Turin 1969–76', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 1982, No.6, Vol.2, pp.223–45.

101
'Self-Reduction of Prices in Italy', op. cit., p.186.

102
'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes*, No.2, 'Misery and the Value Form', April, 2010.

103
Raffaele Sbardella, 'The NEP of Class Operaia', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 26 January 2016, available: https://www.viewpointmag.com/2016/01/28/the-nep-of-classe-operaia/

104
'The Autonomy of the Political', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 26 February, 2020, available: https://www.viewpointmag.com/2020/02/26/the-autonomy-of-the-political/

105
'Historical Temporalities of Capital: An Anti-Historicist Perspective', *Historical Materialism*, op. cit., p.62.

106
Michael Hudson, 'From Marx to Goldman Sachs: The Fictions of Fictitious Capital, and the Financialization of Industry', *Critique*, Vol.38, No.3, 2010.

107
Without addressing autonomist Marxism or *operaismo* specifically, in *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, Andrés Saenz De Sicilia emphasises the strong correlation between subsumption and composition and the political valence of characterising subsumption in this manner.

108
Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomous Marxism*, London: Pluto Press, 2002.

109
'The Results of the Immediate Process of Production', op. cit., p.952.

110
Ibid., p.1005.

Arguments

Feeding the Infant

—

Rob Lucas (Endnotes)

By developing critical distinctions between indeterminate and determinate totalities, Lucas reframes totalising understandings of real subsumption as well as the historical periodisations that derive from some of these perspectives. This text forms a developmental bridge between 'False Totalities Don't Have Exits' included in this book and the most elaborated version of 'Error' presented in *Endnotes*, No.5, 2019.

Marxists have long been fond of rambling about 'totality', from the precedent of Hegel's 'Das Wahre ist das Ganze'[1], through Lukács, Korsch, Adorno, Althusser. But if the truth is the whole, or the whole is the false, what actually *is* the whole, aside from its truth value? Is there only one whole, and if not, which one are we talking about? Though Marx was apt to make certain gestures towards a kind of holism, the elevation of totality within Marxism was a Lukácsian innovation. In *Capital*, Marx's use of the term tends to be either contextually specific and non-technical – 'since the existence of commodities as values is purely social, this social existence can be expressed by the totality of their social relations alone'; 'the capitalist class in department I comprises the totality of capitalists who produce means of production' – or implicitly defined in a technical sense as the unity of a particular set of mutually-related moments: 'industrial capital, considered as a self-moving totality'.[2] In neither case do we have the sort of 'saturated' or all-encompassing totality that necessarily raises the ontological question of the nature of our inclusion within that whole, or of how to get 'out' of it, as in certain uses of the concept of 'real subsumption'. Yet revolutionary theory seems constantly to pivot upon this problematic of inclusion and exit, and it displays a recurrent – and perhaps rather morbid – fixation on the idea that some encapsulation has, in some sense, now been *completed*: Adorno, Debord, Camatte, Théorie Communiste, Negri, Jameson etc. And when we think in such terms, the question of revolution easily shades into a somewhat 'theological' problematic of immanence and transcendence, laden with paradoxes: how does something immanent to the mode of production overcome that mode without perpetuating it?

Totality means many things in the history of Marxism. As a work of intellectual history rather than first-order theory, Martin Jay's study of its uses in Western Marxism holds back from addressing directly what it most strikingly demonstrates: the comedy of more than half a century of intellectual exertions around a concept that in the last analysis seems to mean everything and

nothing. Even in this relatively tight cluster of theorists and texts alone, totality identifies the unity of subject and object; of a lost Golden Age; of theory and practice; of a post-capitalist plenitude to come; of the working class; of history; of capitalist society; of theoretical problematics; of the state; of man with nature, and so on.[3] Within a broader history of holism in Western thought, we find it also referring to artworks, the Greek polis, mankind, 'the Spirit of the times', community, the Parmenidean One, the cosmos, life and so on. If it was the perennial will-o'-the-wisp of post-Lukácsian Marxism – whether to be chased or fled from – in the post-Marxist epoch it still persisted through its endless exorcism, whether or not linked in ideological fashion to 'totalitarianism'. Here we will try neither to enshrine nor vilify what is surely so basic a category as to be unavoidable (are we to avoid conceptualising the whole of anything?), but to become reflectively aware of the conceptual artefacts and effects that can come with it. What are we invoking when we invoke some 'totality'?

The Structured Unity of Everything

For those less philosophically inclined and more influenced by Gramscian and Leninist lines of thought – perhaps with an Althusserian admixture – totality is typically a matter of an injunction to think through all the organic complexities of a given society (state, classes, culture, institutions and so on), implicitly with a certain strategic orientation perceived as lacking in the narrow focus of 'economistic' Marxisms. Appealingly for intellectuals, this leaves room for such things as 'culture' on the battlefield of the struggle for socialism or communism. A holistic attitude to the complexities of social formations may be a more useful orientation in concrete thinking than any idea that everything must be traced back somehow to the 'class struggle' or some other privileged moment. But does this amount to anything more than a generic injunction to contextualise? What is the implied *theory* of the whole itself in such cases? What constitutes its unity? Is it something determinate, or just *everything*?

The polemical impetus of the Althusserian project finds its justification in modes of thinking that one still encounters fairly frequently. Althusser had a point in insisting, within the context of Western Marxism, on complexity and an opposition to mystical reductions; in pitting the 'determinate unitary structure' or the 'structured unity of the complex whole' against 'empty unity' and the 'spiritual' or 'expressive' totality.[4] His enduring merit is probably to have signposted a way beyond the circumvolutions of philosophical Western Marxism, towards a theoretically self-conscious appreciation of historical and political complexity. But the positive accomplishments of his project, and the conclusions drawn from it, have always seemed more questionable.

No matter how many times one arrays words like 'complex' and 'structured' against others like 'empty', this does not in itself get one closer to anything determinate. Hegel too polemicised against invocations of a vacuous unity, in such forms as the infamous 'night in which all cows are black' of the Schellingian Absolute. And Althusser's characterisation of a specifically Marxian kind of abstraction – in contradistinction to the Hegelian – as never primordial but always the outcome of prior determinations, seems unwittingly to identify precisely the aspect of Hegel that the mature Marx most self-consciously drew inspiration from.[5] As both Hegel and Marx were well aware, concreteness is something that must be achieved laboriously, through the systematic elaboration of determinations; if it is conjured in advance of this then it can be no more than an *image* of determinacy – at most a 'description' rather than a 'theory', to put it in Althusser's terms: Hegel, Marx and Althusser are all in essential agreement on this.[6] The main question is how to proceed in that elaboration: is this an inductive or deductive process? A matter of analysis or of simple discovery? What is it that drives one forward? The questions of a socially and historically conditioned 'problematic'? The carrot of some positive 'dialectic', or the stick of simple conceptual inadequacy?

Althusser's project of differentiating and theorising the different 'levels' and 'relatively autonomous' moments of the 'complex structure' of capitalist society assumes implicitly that this society can itself be identified unproblematically prior to its analysis into ideology, economy, state etc. As with most theorisations of 'society', that is to say, it seems to be premised on the idea of a coherent, fundamentally self-standing whole, which is surely nothing other than the image of the modern nation-state, with its unifications of internal market, territory, governing institutions, language, ideology and so on. No matter how complex, if the word 'totality' is to mean anything in this usage, there must at minimum be some such ultimate coextensivity to the various levels of this society. But one need not agree with Michael Mann's whole approach to think he had a point in declaring that:

> Societies are not unitary. They are not social systems (closed or open); they are not totalities. We can never find a single bounded society in geographical or social space. Because there is no system, no totality, there cannot be 'sub-systems', 'dimensions', or 'levels' of such a totality. Because there is no whole, social relations cannot be reduced 'ultimately', 'in the last instance', to some systemic property of it...[7]

Can one identify a single concrete society where each level or dimension – ideology, economy, state and so on – is coextensive with the others? Markets and firms straddle borders; states manage economies partially and imperfectly, through whatever limited tools are at their disposal – currency, taxation, legal regulation; ideologies and cultures both condense in specific, sub-state localities and spread trans-nationally; economic structure too is differentiated at sub-state levels. In the period of high Keynesianism and institutionalised collective bargaining, before the Nixon shock and European economic integration, it was easier to think in such terms; there really was a certain regulative unity

of capital and state within individual nation-states. But even then, the globe was not divided into essentially autarkic worlds: any analysis of individual societies in abstraction from global markets and imperial structures, decaying or triumphant, was a distorted one. What, then, was the whole, and what was its theory? Was Althusser's 'structured unity' ultimately that of the entire planet? What is the theory of the entire planet? Can there even be one? While we may analyse, contextualise and describe particular societies, doing so does not seem to get us closer to specifying the unity of the 'determinate unitary structure'. This totality is not yet an object of theory.

Mann was reacting to the Althusserianism of the 1970s, and in some ways his polemical impetus aligned him with contemporaneous post-structuralism assaults on totality. But like any unsystematised series, the neo-Weberian enumeration of 'sources' that he offers as an alternative (politics, ideology, military, economy) invites indefinite expansion. Where, for example, does the power of the controllers of technical infrastructure or of standards-setting bodies come from? None of Mann's categories seem right; perhaps there are five sources – perhaps more are possible. Or, if there really are only four, why this number and not some other? How do we account specifically for the four? That such impertinent questions continue to niggle suggests perhaps that the unsystematised series is not ultimately an alternative to totality-thinking, but the product of an *incompletely theorised* analysis. As Hegel recognised, conceptual thought drives to unite the separate. Every enumeration bears implicitly the question of the unity of the list itself.

Grooming as Totalisation

For Durkheim, 'the concept of totality is but the concept of society in abstract form. It is the whole that contains all things, the supreme class that contains all classes'.[8] But what if there is no concrete concept of society? What if, on the contrary, the concept of society itself is an abstract, indeterminate totality? After all, it is

hard to see how one would go about elaborating theoretically the whole of 'society'. What level of abstraction would be the right one? Should the theory map all the concrete institutions, customs, cultures, groups, individuals, buildings, classes, territories, kinship structures, transactions, laws and so on that would typically be seen as constituting a society? What sort of theory would that be? Where should it stop? Or, if it is to involve something more abstract, what specifies that abstraction? In itself, the concept of society is distinctly lacking in determinate content. While sociological analyses might imbue it with some, to what extent will those analyses be generalisable as a matter of the actual *concept* of society? Durkheim's pronouncement on totality, that is to say, seems to have things precisely inverted: concepts like 'society' are examples of the most abstract, indeterminate kind of totality, for how could a whole that contains *all* things be concrete at the level of theory? In our imaginations we may conjure up a picture of concreteness – some mass of details, like a 'Where's Wally?' picture perhaps – but that is a long way from actual determinacy.

Social wholes in general – at least those beyond a certain scale – seem to be characterised by such elusiveness. What does a nation or civilisation contain, concretely? What about 'the people'? Perhaps this has something to do with the famous 'Dunbar number': an apparent limit to our cognitive capacities in terms of thinking about groups larger than roughly 150 members. For Robin Dunbar, the social bonds of other apes are maintained by direct grooming processes, which set determinate limits on group size, since the number of social connections grows exponentially as members are added, and there is only enough time in the day – and neocortices are only ever big enough – to cultivate and map immediate relations with so many individuals.[9] Radical imaginings of a purely immediate kind of 'society' reduced to direct inter-individual relations – or perhaps of the mythically integral Homeric Greece in the visions of a Winckelmann or the young Lukács – might be said to conceive sociality on the model of the non-linguistic primate group, where it is always in principle

within the capacity of the individual to track the concrete relations between all others. This renders a very distinct kind of social totality, where the social group is always potentially graspable in all its determinations, without abstraction.

Dunbar speculates that the origins of human language, with its capacity for abstraction, may lie in the evolutionary pressure towards the formation of larger groups. He sees evidence for this in all sorts of places: the typical organisational structures of differently sized firms; human neocortex scale relative to other apes; the social-regulative practices of Hutterite communes, and so on. Once group size surpasses this level, new phenomena come into play, such as increasingly hierarchical structures, and a displacement of direct personal loyalties by 'more nebulous and less inspiring concepts such as "the regiment" or "the Queen"'.[10] It is, we might say, as if the totality at play in non-human social groupings were constantly in the active process of totalisation – always deliberately cultivating and remaking itself in each of its links, and thus always potentially present to itself in all its determinations – but that what some archaeologists and anthropologists term the 'human revolution' introduced an abstractive rupture into the continuity of animal social forms, after which the social totality would need to be thought through abstract concepts such as the king's second body, the nation-state, God's chosen people, the corporation or cosmopolitan world society.

The indeterminate totalisation of the social whole would then be not simply a failure of thought, but an abstractive function that enables that whole to exist in the first place. Social groups unify themselves under the sign of one or another concept that can stand in for the whole, yet without specifying it concretely. The nation comes into being in referring to itself as such; it performatively establishes a social actuality for itself, embodying itself in institutions, cultures and so on; yet it remains in the nature of such concepts to resist pinning down definitively.[11] This projected unity of the indeterminate is thus perhaps a structural facet of social thinking, and indeed of 'society' itself, beyond the

smallest scales – a sort of placeholder, a zero or an ∞, always in lieu of substantiation, but always essential to the very possibility of the large-scale social entity. If this is the case, then we perhaps have some explanation for the elusiveness of the totality. Real, but indeterminately so, the social whole gives to our thought a basic compulsion to totalise with similar indeterminacy. But such totalisations necessarily remain pre-theoretical: if the work of theory is to illuminate and specify something previously implicit or unclear, we might reasonably doubt that any amount of theorising will ever elaborate the concept of something like 'society'. What we *might* shed light on instead, is the problem of this indeterminacy itself.

Revolution Against Everything

This matters for revolutionary thinking because it has a bearing on the question of what is actually to be overcome. What is the scope of revolution? If it is a whole that contains all things then we must wonder where to begin; anywhere might be as good as anywhere else. If the object of revolution is to be a hazily defined 'society', this is liable to leave the notion of revolution itself hopelessly indeterminate. As long as we are operating at this level, revolution seems to remain a matter of what Hegel termed 'picture thinking' (*Vorstellung*). It may be brought to mind as a fantasised event, such as a global riot, insurrection or the formation of an organisation – depending on your identity and affiliations. Such speculative imaginings may at least perform a certain role in making present to consciousness the question of radical social change, but they betray a poverty of actual content, as indeterminate as the world that they are arrayed against. In order to move from picture to theory, it is necessary to address this problem of scope, and to question the compulsion to totalise indeterminately.

Not all totalities are indeterminate. The capitalist mode of production is what we term a *determinate* totality, and it is such a totality that Marx strove to elaborate in the volumes of *Capital*. It is determinate because it is possible to specify in detail the

mediations that constitute it – labour, capital, money, means of production and so on – and to show how these relate to each other in such a way as to constitute an integral whole. Capitalist *society* by contrast, with all its people, cultures, institutions, practices, beliefs and so on, is an *indeterminate* totality: no theoretical analysis could ever enumerate its mediations as an internally self-related system. In Marxist theory, things like 'society' tend to be closely identified with concepts derived from the critique of political economy such as 'the capitalist mode of production', or more loosely, 'capitalism'. There is often an implicit telescoping of terms, such that 'society' – with all its indeterminacy – is identified with 'capitalism', which is in turn identified with 'the capitalist mode of production', or simply 'capital'.

This telescoping identification of concepts can lead to certain illusions of explanation, such that one seems to promise to account for the other – as if all the moments of capital's systematic self-positing could be enough to explain whatever 'society' is. Marx constructed lucid explanations of what capital is, how individual capitals relate to each other, how they form something more general, how capital relates to workers, why the classical political economists were systematically blind to certain things about all this, and so on. This does not however mean that he had a general theory of whatever it might be that 'society' denotes, or even 'capitalism' (if we take this to be anything more than a contraction of 'the capitalist mode of production'). The theory of capital does not in itself account for the projected unity of the social world; although no doubt in many ways related, these are quite distinct. If we cannot construct a theory of 'society', or even of 'capitalism', in the way that we can construct a theory of capital, nor can a theory of the one stand in as a theory of the other.

Capital as Society

There are, however, some concepts that seem to provide justification for the identification of the mode of production in a strict sense with other aspects of the social world. Subsumption and

reproduction are key examples: the first, in summary, because it seems to identify a way in which capital incorporates within itself a world beyond it; the second because if society reproduces itself through the mode of production, it might seem to follow that everything that occurs within 'society', and which can be characterised as reproductive in some sense, is part of the mode of production.[12] Let's consider these concepts in more detail.

In a fairly loose sense, 'subsumption' has entered the lexicon of critical social theory: this or that aspect of society, reason, culture, nature may be said to have been at some point 'subsumed' by 'capitalist logic' or suchlike.[13] This non-technical usage names a certain basic intuition about how capital profoundly shapes the world in general, and there is of course much truth in this. But there is also a stronger, more ostensibly technical sense in which it has entered some conceptual toolkits. As we noted back in *Endnotes* No.2, since the 1970s or so, when many people first discovered the 'missing sixth chapter' of *Capital*, some – particularly on the French ultra-left – have perceived in Marx's distinction of formal and real subsumption a periodisation of the history of capitalist society.[14] Crucial to this is the way in which subsumption seems to provide a bridge between the capitalist production process in the narrow sense and more expansive notions such as society or humanity. It can thus seem to perform a theoretical role reminiscent of 'reification' in the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*.

For Jacques Camatte, writing in the 1970s, an 'anthropomorphosis of capital' had occurred, such that capital became directly identified with human community as such:

> The fact that capital is erected as a material community allows capital to avoid losing itself in all the various processes. This community flourishes on the dead and the reified. But, with the movement of anthropomorphosis, capital becoming man, its community poses as *Gemeinwesen*. Thus men are snared by the being they themselves produced.[15]

In the process, for Camatte, capital had integrated the proletariat by 'capitalizing' it, and 'everything' had 'become capital' in a kind of total subsumption. This had practical implications: the Bordigist 'theory of the proletariat'; the problematic of class consciousness; the revolutionary organisation; the orthodox faith in the progressive development of the productive forces – all were to be abandoned in favour of an orientation to a human species viewed as domesticated and decadent, and hope could only lie in something external to this monolithic totality. Yet since capital was identified with human community as such, 'having absorbed all the old contradictions', it became hard to see what the positive content of such an outside could be; were we to be left merely positing an empty transcendence?[16]

There are echoes of these formulations in Théorie Communiste's work, albeit shorn of the humanist mysticism. Rather than humanity, here we find, in a particular historical moment, capital 'becoming' capitalist society through a process of subsumption:

> It is not possible to understand the real subsumption of labour under capital without considering that what occurs in the labour process only resolves itself outside of it. Capital, as society […], is a perpetual work of the formation of its inherent contradictions at the level of its reproduction which undergoes phases of profound mutations. It is possible to go so far as to say that the real subsumption of labour under capital is defined as capital becoming capitalist society, i.e. presupposing itself in its evolution and in the creation of its organs.[17]

The justification for this identification seems to be that the main prerequisite of the capitalist production process – the separation of capital and labour – is also its major outcome. At a general social level, this means the reproduction of the fundamental classes of capitalist society, and the perpetuation of capitalist relations of

production. And once we are talking at this level of social reproduction it becomes tempting to slide from the narrow gyrations of capital's own circuit to the reproductive functions of all sorts of aspects of 'society'.

> As far as real subsumption is concerned, the criterion for its dominance has to be sought out in the modalities of reproduction of labour-power (social and political modalities): social welfare systems, the invention of the category of the unemployed, the importance of trade unionism, etc. All this naturally accompanies the transformations in the labour process: the decline of handicrafts and domestic industry caused by the first phase of large-scale industry. In order for there to be real subsumption, […] modalities of reproduction of labour-power must be created which are adequate to the transformations accomplished in the labour process.[18]

Since the reproduction of capitalist relations of production can be conceived as the reproduction of capitalist society, an elision can be performed whereby the whole of society becomes little more than the capitalist production process writ large. And since that process has a peculiar developmental dynamic, it becomes tempting to read this into the history of capitalism in general. Thus Marx's logical schematisation of the phases in capital's relationship to its production process – moving from formal to real subsumption – becomes a historical periodisation of capitalist society as a whole.

The theoretico-historical apparatus that Théorie Communiste have constructed on this basis is in many ways a sophisticated and compelling one. And the language of subsumption seems to chime with a general intuition that some fundamental incorporation has taken place. But this is a striking case of that telescoping pattern of identification that we encountered earlier, where the logical totality of the moments of capital's circuit comes to account somehow for the indeterminate totality

of society, for the imagined unity of the social world. The telescoping movement provides an illusion of systematicity as well as of explanation: if we can elaborate in some theoretical detail what it is for capital to subsume the moments of the production process, and if this subsumption gives us a ticket to the level of 'society' as such, then *Volume 1* of *Capital* (read through its 'missing' sixth chapter) becomes a total theory of society and everything in it, and the problem of revolution becomes the ontological one of inclusion within a capital-saturated totality, a problem of immanence and transcendence, while we circle infinitely around a seductively enigmatic paradox: 'How can the proletariat, acting strictly as a class of this mode of production, in its contradiction with capital within the capitalist mode of production, abolish classes, and therefore itself, that is to say: produce communism?'[19]

How We Become Capital

Let's revisit this question of subsumption once more, to clarify what it actually involves. If, through 'subsumption', capital does not merely shape the world but actually seems in some sense to incorporate it within itself, what is the nature of this incorporation?

Means of production are subsumed by capital in an ontological sense when it takes hold of them and makes them serve the ends of its self-valorisation. The employment of workers is part of this process, and in this case the wage is the key mediation. As part of capital's circuit that wage posits the worker's labour as its content. Here our labour appears as 'part of' the capitalist mode of production not just in the manner of this or that incidental aspect of the forces and relations of production of a given capitalist society, but as a systemic aspect of capital's own production process – indeed, as part of capital itself. In the wage, an abstract monetary magnitude ranges our labouring capacity under itself, such that certain of our concrete exertions appear as a mere facet of capital's own self-aggrandising project. The peculiarity of such arrangements led Marx to conceptualise them

with a word borrowed from logic and ontology: the technical term for some ranging of particulars under a universal – such as that of animals under their species – is subsumption.[20]

This is different from mere 'domination', which is a matter of being ruled over by the master of the house – the *domus*. In a relation of domination the two poles remain relatively external to each other, unimplicated in one another's being. But when some particular is subsumed under a universal, the relation is between two inextricable logical facets of some self-same being: a whale is both *this* whale, and *a whale*. The universal presents itself as the essential truth of the particular, the particular as a mere instance of the universal. Monetary exchange is peculiar in realising something like this not just as a mental operation, but as something practically real and socially objective. In every act of exchange, a monetary quantity presents itself as the true measure of some thing, in all its qualitative irreducibility; a mass of particulars is subsumed.

If the claims of money over what it buys have always had a certain ontological character, as long as we are focused only on the moment of exchange this inclusion appears as strictly momentary. If the monetary measure seems to subsume the qualities of the commodity, it does so only fleetingly and from a specific standpoint: once bought, this book ceases to perform as a commodity, subsisting simply as your book, until you decide to sell it on to someone else. Likewise, labour-power, once bought with a wage, ceases to present itself as a commodity, dissolving itself into the flows of daily activity; the wage presents itself as the truth of the worker's labour only when they go to market – which is to say, only as long as we are considering their labour-power itself as one side of a market-mediated transaction. Thus this ontological mode of inclusion so far signalled by the term 'subsumption' appears, by the same token, extremely weak. Insofar as labour is only ever posited passingly and contingently as the content of the wage, in instants of mere exchange, it barely raises the ontological question of inclusion and exit.

A greater necessity comes into play when we consider not simply monetary exchange in general, but exchange as a moment of capital's circuit. The various transactions which make up capital's valorisation process constitute a certain unity, which folds back upon itself to reproduce some of its own conditions: profits are reinvested in subsequent iterations of the process. These exchanges can be understood as the moments of a single process, and thus so can the accompanying dynamic of subsumption. Where we are dealing not just with financial or merchant's capital, but with a capital that has taken hold of some production process, its various exchanges can be seen as enacting the subsumption of another unified process. It is insofar as my labour participates in this process that it is identified specifically with capital and not just with the wage that I am paid. Insofar as it inherits a kind of necessity from capital's circuit, subsumption may seem to have deepened here, but it has also inherited the contingency of the mere moment of exchange, and is still distinctly weak. For though my labour feeds the capitalist glutton during the day, my *capacity* to work comes home with me in the evening, itself unsubsumed by this particular capital, and free in principle to go elsewhere: this is part of the definition of wage labour as opposed to dependent labour or slavery.

If I am in a sense 'included' in a particular capital during the working day, this always remains a particular capital, for the drive to accumulate has the individual firm as its irreducible nexus. No worker is employed by – and no means of production are set in motion by – 'capital in general': it is always a particular firm that offers a wage in order to keep in motion its own production process, that aims to sell the result at a profit, and that returns again to the labour market with the resulting revenues. Strictly speaking – that is to say, understood rigorously not simply as domination, but as a logical or ontological matter – 'subsumption under capital' occurs only within this basic circuit. Whether merely formal or fully real, subsumption under capital by definition occurs only within individual production processes, for it is only there that anything is

directly identified with, or included within, capital itself. And thus, insofar as the wage permits no capital to claim me in my entirety, this ontological inclusion identified by the concept of subsumption still remains weak. There is always a world outside, and we are always part of it. In this sense subsumption under capital does not in itself even raise the ontological question of inclusion within – and exit from – the mode of production.

Infancy to Dotage

Of course, capitalist production processes have major implications beyond their own narrow circuits, encompassing such things as the carbonisation of the atmosphere and the melting of the ice caps. But implications are not identifications: things do not have to become capital to be affected by it, even profoundly. Whatever its outcomes, if subsumption under capital, strictly speaking, occurs only at the level of individual capitals, it cannot directly characterise society in general, or its history, especially not at a global level.

That subsumption occurs strictly at this level also has implications for any attempt to periodise capital itself in these terms. Each capital will negotiate its relationship to each of the things that compose its production process in a particular way, accepting them as is, reorganising or transforming them. With time, these reorganisations and transformations will of course accumulate and deepen. Thus these subsumptive relationships will tend to chart a trajectory from a 'formal' to a 'real' character, and such developments will spread from one capital to another, tendentially generalising throughout the global economy. Thus the aggregate too will tend to chart a trajectory from 'formal' to 'real'. But if everything tends to run in one direction, that 'everything' is a vast chaotic manifold that cannot itself be reduced to single stages at given points in history, as if last year the wider world was only formally subsumed while this year it *really* is.[21] This is because the distinction between formal and real subsumption schematises, in the abstract, the *generic temporality* of the capitalist production

process, not its *social history*. The human ageing process too is generally unilinear – one must be young first before one can be old – and we may say that the human race in aggregate is now demographically older than it was a few decades ago, but any claim that human history *as a whole* could be divided into such things as an 'adolescence' and a 'maturity' could only ever be a dubious metaphor; here too, there is a key distinction to be made between temporality and history.

Historical attempts to distinguish between eras of formal and real subsumption do have some formal resemblance to another, more legitimate, distinction between phases. At the level of the most abstract form it makes obvious sense that an 'extensive' moment would have to precede any 'intensive' one. And it is empirically true that pre-capitalist exploitation was typically extensive, while the coming into being of capitalism involved a shift to a kind of intensive growth. Prior to the emergence of agrarian capitalism – and continuing until relatively late in contexts such as the European absolutist state – exploiting classes have tended to gain greater surpluses just by squeezing more out of their inferiors through extra-economic power. The peculiarity of the English state and agrarian economy immediately prior to the formation of capitalist relations of production was the way in which the configuration of these two removed that option, compelling landowners to extract a surplus from their tenants by means of the market in rents, while driving producers to increase their productivity and 'improve' the land.[22] It is in such intensive development that we find the origins of capitalism, for it set in train an ever-expanding process of accumulation and dispossession of which both proletariat and capital were products. If capitalism finds its origins in intensive development, it then drives that development further as market competition ceaselessly compels producers to make transformations in the production process: in this sense, capitalism *is* real subsumption.

Any attempt to tell this history on the basis of shifts to formal then real subsumption would seem implicitly to assume

both a pre-existing capital, always already capable in principle of grabbing hold of its share of the world, and a pre-existing proletariat always already lining up at the factory gates. Accounts of so-called primitive accumulation, which imagine the origin of capitalism as something constituted more or less 'politically' – through simple violence and a sort of extensive development which had the effect of heaping up capital on the one side and labour on the other – seem to make a similar assumption.[23] For how do we account for the separation of the political and the economic, which itself is something peculiar to capitalist society? In ancient empires rapacious violence and expropriation tended to increase such things as tax revenues and supplies of slave labour rather than laying the bases of capital accumulation.

Policing the Exit

If capitalism is real subsumption, and has always had this intensive character, then it does not make sense to think of real subsumption as posing the sort of problem of inclusion and exit that we have been interrogating here – at least, no more so than the capitalist mode of production always has. Real subsumption in itself cannot characterise either an epoch or a society, and it has not, in itself, enchained every reproductive aspect of the entirety of society to the production process. But if – as we found in our look at the ontology of subsumption under capital – we always inhabit a world beyond the capitalist production process strictly speaking, then why can we not simply abandon this mode of production and do something else? What is the real nature of the problem? There are surely reasons for the popularity of such ideas; they seem to correspond to a certain intuition.

There are several possible answers to this question. Firstly, given their historical concurrence, it is easy to identify the capitalist mode of production with the modern nation state. As the latter encompasses us within its borders, manages us through its bureaucratic institutions, regulates us through its laws, inculcates in us a specific culture and language, its relation to us can seem in a

sense deeply ontological. And in its own way – though the logics are fundamentally distinct – the state may be just as subsumptive as capital: political sovereignty involves an identification of citizens and subjects with a greater whole.[24] Rather than the capitalist mode of production, it may be that it is the programme of national state-consolidation that helps explain the holisms of Hegel, Croce or Gramsci – intellectuals self-consciously struggling to do their universalistic, integrative bit – and thus a significant aspect of the Marxist discourse of totality.[25]

In themselves, the fearsome encaging effects of political power are of course not something particular to the capitalist epoch. Consider Gibbon's terrifyingly totalistic description of the imperial Roman state:

> The empire of the Romans filled the world, and when the empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies. The slave of Imperial despotism […] expected his fate in silent despair. To resist was fatal, and it was impossible to fly. On every side he was encompassed with a vast extent of sea and land, which he could never hope to traverse without being discovered, seized, and restored to his irritated master. Beyond the frontiers, his anxious view could discover nothing, except the ocean, inhospitable deserts, hostile tribes of barbarians, of fierce manners and unknown language, or dependent kings, who would gladly purchase the emperor's protection by the sacrifice of an obnoxious fugitive.[26]

Given the relative constraints on their communicative capacities, it is hard to believe that earlier forms of political power could ever have felt quite as total as those of the present, yet Gibbon's fugitive of Rome is not all that far from the despairing Foucauldian, fixated on the repressive powers of the modern state. That is, in short, because the encompassment and repressive

regulation of a population is just what states do, and have done since their Neolithic origins.

Nonetheless, states must have seemed more porous and provisional prior to the consolidation of the bureaucracies and infrastructures of the modern world: feudal boundaries were constantly shifting due to the vagaries of aristocratic succession; the physical walls of the *polis* gave way to relatively unprotected countryside which might readily change hands with some shift of fortune; the inhabitants might be moved en masse to some other location or colony; the ebbs and flows of imperial conquest could displace large populations; and throughout much of human history, nomadism was still a relatively familiar phenomenon from beyond the bounds of the agrarian state. Such things must have had a bearing on the character of the social imaginary; active membership of the citizen body, and its absence or withdrawal, could be central in policing the bounds of the *polis* (thus the importance of exile and ostracism in the Greek world), but could the individual ever have imagined themselves as included within some saturated, all-encompassing totality as we are prone to now?

Is, then, the real problem of inclusion and exit that of the state, rather than the mode of production? Though its precise definition may remain somewhat blurry, with all its identifiable institutional articulations this state is a more determinate totality than is society as such. And in an important sense the state also helps tether us within specific relations of production: its repressive apparatuses prevent us from simply walking out of the workplace and finding another way to feed ourselves. But this is not simply a matter of policing the exit – after all, the land that we might use for such ends is already possessed by someone else, and it is specifically the maintenance of that possession that matters. And thus we quickly find our way back to capitalism and its fundamentally agrarian basis.[27] Though it is hard to come by reliable statistical data (since many landowners like to hide behind layers of legal obscurity), holders of land amount to a tiny and dwindling portion of the population, and some of them are extremely powerful. Such

people have of course ensured their protection, and any genuine attempt at some proletarian reappropriation of agricultural land would immediately run up against the full force of a heavily militarised surveillance state which has us hemmed into its borders. This is the real bind that we will one day need somehow to find our way out of.

Capital's Infant

The crux here is not an ontological matter of incorporation or identification. It is a problem of *dependence* and its modalities. Market dependence is the principle prerequisite for the establishment and maintenance of the capitalist mode of production; it is firstly market dependence that will need to be overcome if we are ever to move beyond it; and market dependence is premised upon a separation from means of subsistence. There is at least some scope for a nominal reciprocity within this basic dependence: though workers need commodities, capital too has a need for labour. But the tendency of this relationship to issue in a surplus population amounts to a shift from mutual dependency – albeit within an asymmetry of power – towards an increasingly lopsided situation, in which a large part of the human population clings on for dear life to its dysfunctional supplier of subsistence goods. Bound to the extraction of fossil fuels and a broader despoliation of nature, this supplier threatens ultimately to kill its dependents. Such profound dependence on something that threatens ultimately to kill us might be compared to a narcotic addiction, but the reproductive, nutritive nature of the bond here invokes something even more thoroughly existential: the fragility of the infant. The proletariat is the dependent child of capital, infantilised by capitalist society and insecurely attached to a parent constantly threatening to withhold their affections.

It is easy to mistake thoroughgoing dependency for perfect identification, as if the capital relation permitted some womb-like 'oceanic feeling'. But we are not enclosed within this mode of production as in a uterus. Though the dependency may

be complete, it does not engulf us. And even a baby does a great deal more than eat and shit: it is a self-developing neural system which learns spontaneously to integrate and regulate its sensory organs, limbs, interior; to locate itself in space; to form a posture oriented to the world of things and people stretching beyond its parents; to extend the neural maps of its limbs into tools, and to begin to make that world act upon itself – all alongside a complete alimentary dependency. Capital's dependents too will have to develop a posture, an orientation, tools, if they are to stand a chance of eating after their parent's demise, and they cannot and do not merely wait for that moment. Everywhere people strive to stand and become mobile; to set and follow their own rules, if given half a chance. They find ways with the stuff of the world to construct themselves and to reconstruct that stuff. Insofar as capitalist society inhibits or prohibits that development of autonomy, it infantilises us. But the infant must learn to feed itself.

1

'The True is the whole': *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Trans. A.V. Miller), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, p.11. In the next sentence, Hegel specifies what he means by a whole: 'the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development' – which is to say, it is not just *everything*, but the specifically Hegelian notion of the Absolute as something constituted through the determinate mediations of the self-unfolding of *Geist*.

2

Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol.1*, in *MECW*, *Vol.35*, p.77; *Capital, Vol.2* (Trans. David Fernbach), London: Penguin, 1978, pp.498; ibid. p.182.

3

Martin Jay, *Marxism & Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

4

Inter alia, Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, London and New York: London: Verso, 2005, p.67, p.202 and Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar; Jacques Rancière; Pierre Macherey; et al, *Reading Capital*, London and New York: Verso, 1997, p.17.

5

For example, *For Marx*, op. cit., p.67; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, pp.100–108; G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969, pp.70–72.

6

Those schooled in Western Marxism or 20th Century French philosophy may be surprised that the category of totality strictly speaking was of little more importance for Hegel than for the mature Marx: as we might expect for a term that can be deployed as a synonym for 'all' or 'whole', it peppers the *Logic*, yet unlike categories such as Being, Quantity, Measure, it doesn't even get its own section.

7

Michael Mann, *Sources of Social Power, Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.1.

8

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [1912], Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.443.

9

Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1996.

10

Ibid.

11

Note here the possibility of parallelisms with money as universal equivalent. This is the sort of thing Marx had fun with, drawing analogies with such things as the Hegelian sovereign. A certain kind of value-critical maximalism may be inclined to use this as a justification for treating the value-form as a kind of Godhead, in relation to which all other social forms are mere emanations. But it is hard to reconcile such thinking with historical realities such as, for example, the imperial structure of Inca civilisation, which was essentially moneyless but was anything but immediately self-present or abstraction-free.

12

One might anticipate this problem extending to 'social reproduction theory', but serious analysis of works in that area will have to wait for another day. Here we will concern ourselves only with reproduction as it is conceptualised in the example of Théorie Communiste's work, where it is closely related to real subsumption.

13

See for example, Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*, Verso: London and New York 2016, p.202: 'a progressive subsumption of social life under the organizing principles of a capitalist economy is an inherent, ever-present danger of life under capitalism that needs to be politically counteracted.'

14

Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes,* No.2*: Misery and the Value Form*, April, 2010.

15

Jacques Camatte, 'Preface to the French edition' and 'Remarks', in

Capital and Community: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx, London: Unpopular Books, 1988, available, https://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/capcom/index.htm

16

Jacques Camatte, *The Wandering of Humanity*, (Trans. Fredy Perlman), Detroit: Black and Red, 1975; available, https://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/wanhum/

17

'Théorie Communiste Responds', in *Aufheben,* No.13, 2005.

18

Ibid.

19

Théorie Communiste, 'Théorie Communiste' in *Théorie Communiste,* No.14, 1997, p.48.

20

For a fuller elaboration of these points see 'The History of Subsumption', op. cit.

21

For Théorie Communiste, as for the regulation school, the key shift here occurred around the First World War, when increasing productivity of labour supposedly first began to cheapen goods consumed by the working class. Under the influence of the French ultra-left, Loren Goldner has made essentially the same claim, seemingly contradicting his own Bordiga-inspired recognition that 'capitalism is first of all the agrarian revolution; before it is possible to have industry and cities and urban workers, it is necessary to revolutionise agricultural productivity to have the surplus to free labour-power from the land': Loren Goldner, 'Amadeo Bordiga, the Agrarian Question and the International Revolutionary Movement', in *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory,* Vol.23, No.1, 1995. In *Endnotes* we have already pointed out the empirical implausibility of this idea, referring readers to Robert Brenner and Mark Glick's critique of regulationism; I do so again: 'The Regulation Approach: Theory and History,' *New Left Review* No.188, July–August, 1991. The key problem, as we argued there, is that 'capitalist production tends to commoditise and cheapen consumer goods from the outset, and agriculture is not something that is capitalised late, except perhaps in particular cases such as that of France, whose rural landscape remained dominated throughout the 19th century by small peasant owner-producers.' Indeed, simple logic suggests that the development of large proletarianised populations living in cities could not take place without productivity growth in agriculture, though it of course says nothing about the sources of that growth. For these, we need to look to the vagaries and outcomes of agrarian class struggle in such places as pre-industrial England; see Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', in T.H. Ashton & C.H.E. Philpin (Eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. For a more global view of agricultural transitions to capitalism see Christopher Isett and Stephen Miller, *The Social History of Agriculture: From the Origins to the Current Crisis*, London: Rowman & Littlefield 2016.

22

Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, London and New York: Verso, 2017 and Robert Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', op. cit., pp.10–63.

23

This is presumably a side-effect of Marx's polemical purpose in Part 8 of *Capital, Vol.1*: debunking Smith's dreamily peaceable 'previous' accumulation by pointing out the brutal realities that the beginnings of capitalism actually entailed. (The specific connotations of barbarism in the rendering of Marx's *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* as 'primitive accumulation' are an artefact of the retranslation into English of Marx's German translation of Smith's term.) But this polemic does not amount to a positive theory of origins; Marx left useful leads, gesturing towards many possible factors in the origin of capitalism, but worked none up to the status of what can reasonably be called a theory. He identified the capitalisation

of English agriculture as a key moment, but went on to claim every other violent act of European colonisation – even Spanish and Portuguese, which specifically did not lead directly to capitalism – as an example of 'primitive accumulation', while appealing to an abstract 'force' as an 'economic' factor driving this process. A teleological bias contributes to the confusion, various things that preceded capitalism being identified with its origins seemingly because of what came after them. Subsequent attempts to identify one or another violent accumulation process with 'Marx's concept of primitive accumulation' gain little theoretical insight from this appellation, whatever the other merits of the analyses in which they are deployed.

24

Indeed, Marx's concept of subsumption under capital stems from Hegel's description of the subsumption of the particularity of civil society under the universality of the sovereign's decision – a characterisation that the young Marx thought outrageously idealist. G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.328; Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* in *MECW,* Vol.3, p.48.

25

Marxism & Totality, op. cit., pp.72–6.

26

Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire Vol.1*, New York: De Fau, 1776, pp.99–100.

27

On this, and for a discussion closely related to the present text, as well as 'Error', see John Clegg and Rob Lucas, 'Three Agricultural Revolutions', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.119, No.1, January, 2020.

Arguments

Spain and Communisation Theory: Past and Present

—

Federico Corriente

Federico Corriente's essay, originally presented in Bilbao, explores a rich archaeology of autonomist and libertarian threads of theory and group formation on the Spanish left and its (mostly) missed encounters with a complex of theoretical developments made on the French and Italian left during the period 1960–1980.

> […] As far as I remember, the word itself came up around 1972-74 among a number of people who were critical of, but inspired by, the SI, the German and Italian Left, etc. Maybe the first person who used the word was Pierre Guillaume, the bookseller (and ex-*Socialisme ou Barbarie* member) of 'The Old Mole' (that was the bookshop's name). He certainly was the first one to give the concept its importance. Maybe the word was coined by Dominique Blanc, who was then to be the main person in the group and journal *La Guerre Sociale*, who wrote a very stimulating and pioneering essay, 'A World without Money'… The sad thing is, this very forceful notion was not really developed by the small milieu it came from. Maybe a sign of the weakness on the part of the communist movement (as a social movement, not just people like you and me).
>
> […] Anyway, I've only ever met hostility from the heirs of the German-Dutch left, *ICO* and recently *Échanges et Mouvement* – I suppose their aggressiveness comes from deep incomprehension. To them, borrowing from both Bordiga and Pannekoek must appear like crossdressing appeared to my mother.
> – Correspondence between parts of the Riff-Raff-collective and Gilles Dauvé (aka Jean Barrot), *Riff-Raff ,* No.7, (March 2004)[1]

Preliminaries: on Communisation and the Ultra-left

An article dealing with the birth process of communisation theory from its origins in the critique of the ultra-left and its reception in Spain might well begin with a reference to one or two Spanish counterparts of the great revolutionary theorists – the Luxemburgs, Gorters, Pannekoeks and Bordigas – that came to the fore during the worldwide cycle of revolutionary workers' struggles that began in 1917. Unfortunately, however, not a single name comes to mind. This in itself is a most striking

fact, particularly when one considers that in Spain the hallowed year 1917 was witness to a revolutionary general strike and that according to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle,* the 1936 revolution supposedly set up 'the most advanced model of proletarian power ever realized'. If Debord's assertion is correct, one can only wonder at the lack of theoretical impact this revolutionary upheaval had in comparison to its Russian, German, and Italian predecessors. The vast amounts of literature on the 'Spanish revolution' notwithstanding – the finest instances of which, significantly, have almost invariably been penned by non-Spaniards – this absence would seem to bear out the old Bordigist contention according to which the Spanish events of 1936 did little more than provide negative confirmation of the theoretical lessons learned many years before by the Communist Left in Germany and Italy.

Rather than ascribing this theoretical void to some endemic Iberian 'intellectual poverty', this scarcity of up-to-scratch theorising must be put down, at least in part, to the fact that all the aforementioned European revolutionaries were forced to reckon with the challenges that the 'transitional period' between the formal and the real subsumption of capital[2] posed to the international workers' movement, whereas in Spain the decisive stage of this transition wasn't really reached until the Francoist 'stabilisation plan' of 1958.[3] (A parallel process in France would also explain the absence of outstanding Marxist theorists there prior to the 1950s.)

Undoubtedly, though, the 'Spanish revolution' did provide an enormous boost for the ideological credibility of the fascism/antifascism opposition, which was the ideological backdrop of the Second World War that paved the way for the global transition between formal and real domination under US hegemony. In the process, the 'brief Spanish summer of anarchy', with its touting of 'workers' democracy' and 'self-management', also supplied the non-Stalinist left with the lasting image of an 'anti-authoritarian' solution to the riddle of the abolition of capitalism. In this respect, the epic mythologising of the 'revolutionary' side of the Spanish

Civil War might be considered as one of the major instances of the uncritical celebration of the purportedly 'undefeated side' that accompanied the working class struggles of the 1917–1968 period.

Far from finally ushering in this 'undefeated side' (workers' councils, direct democracy, the struggle against the labour bureaucracy) as the cornerstone of a new wave of revolutionary activity, May '68 and the years immediately following it turned out to be the swan song of the workers' movement and its main linchpin, the affirmation of working class power. Indeed, one of the main lessons of May '68 was that henceforth communist revolution would have less to do with 'workers' power' than with the joint subversion and transformation of both the sphere of production and that of everyday life. By the same token, this implied going beyond the issues of organisation, management and decision-making as the be all and end all of revolutionary activity. Slowly but surely, as the global wave of struggles of 1968–1973 unfolded, the entire notion of the abolition of capitalism began to undergo radical mutations. The recognition that opposing the Leninist vanguard party model with ultra-democratic anti-authoritarian organisational forms didn't get to the root of the matter was merely a first settling of accounts, immediately followed by the rejection of the need for a 'transitional period' after a working class 'takeover'. This was replaced by the notion of communisation, i.e., the immediate adoption of communist measures for the simultaneous purpose of abolishing the proletariat *and* undermining the material basis of the counter-revolution.

As had been the case at other turning points in the history of the communist movement, the theoretical innovations that came to the fore in the early 1970's were not the mere fantasies of a handful of would-be universal reformers, but conclusions drawn from new characteristics and forms evidenced by the class struggle during those years – such as sabotage, absenteeism and other forms of the refusal of work – and the appearance of a host of new non-workplace based struggles in the sphere of social reproduction, including ghetto riots, the women's movement, prison revolts,

ecology or the anti-nuclear movement. All of these movements could be seen as rejections of the centrality of labour and of workers' identity as the basis of revolution and came into being precisely at the moment when the global devalorisation of capital was putting an end to the worldwide expansion of the productive working class.

As a result, it began to transpire that class antagonism was only one of the forms in which capital structures unequal access to wage labour and the multiple antagonisms it gives rise to, others factors being race, gender, sexuality or nationality. Indeed, the crisis of workers' identity also signalled the end of the spurious notion that the defining feature of proletarians and the only thing they truly had in common – i.e., their mutual separation – could be overcome by any form of political action. The proletariat could only put an end to this separation, it was now argued, by actively destroying the foundations of its existence as a class. Another corollary of the rejection of workers' identity was that the notions of 'class consciousness' and 'revolutionary organisation' were also called into question and came under attack as mere tools with which political sects traded on what some now denounced as their 'general equivalent' and bargaining chip: the proletariat (as subject and as representation).

Although in no way limited to the most advanced capitalist nations, the mounting revolt against work undoubtedly found its clearest theoretical expression in countries like the USA, France, Italy and the UK. Groundbreaking texts, such as Négation's *Lip et la contre-révolution autogestionnaire* (1973) (published in Detroit in 1975 by Black & Red as *Lip and the Self-managed Counter-revolution*, 1975), Les Amis de Quatre Milllions de Jeunes Travailleurs' (aka Pomerol & Médoc) *Lordstown 72 ou les déboires de la Général Motors* (1973), or Échanges et mouvement's *Refus du travail, faits et discussions* (1978) (*The Refusal of Work*, 1979), – none of which, significantly, were ever translated into Spanish – detailed the 'refusal of work', as well as the shock waves of denial and incomprehension it sent through the ranks of the 'established' councilist ultra-left.

There is undoubtedly a great deal to be learned from the study of the crises that ravaged the French ultra-left milieu during the early 1970's, which in many respects anticipated later and much more publicised developments in Italy. The fact that so little is known or has been written about this period of upheaval certainly has nothing to do with its lack of interest, but rather with the interest of the present day heirs of this milieu to avoid evoking an annoying and awkward moment of their history. Though the crisis of the ultra-left made quite a few of these groupings disappear forever, others regrouped and evolved toward neo-orthodox outfits which combined the tenets of Bordigism with the legacy of Dutch-German Councilism while simultaneously taking great pains to root out the corrosive influence of the 'situationist' critique of militantism and everyday life from their ranks, hastily written off as intellectual expressions of a rebellious 'petty bourgeoisie'.[4]

The initial stirrings of what might be called 'early communisation theory' began as a critique of the limitations of councilism and workers' self-organisation within the French workerist network *ICO* (*Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières*), which had split from *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1958.[5] *ICO* was a loose grouping of factory militants of various political persuasions – anarchists, Marxists and non-aligned militants – linked together by strong feelings about class struggle and a general hostility to the development of any coherent theory, which they considered to lead inevitably to domination by intellectual 'elites', i.e., 'bureaucracies'.

By all accounts, *ICO* played a rather sad role during May '68: in accordance with its basic principles, it limited itself to holding regular meetings at the Censier Centre, where it kept to its customary practice of circulating 'information' without engaging in any sort of collective action or involving itself in the coordination of the committees under the pretext that these only represented a minority of workers. In effect, and as a result of its striving to maintain its 'purity' as a non-vanguardist worker's group, *ICO* ended up condemning precisely what constituted the most subversive aspect of May '68: the establishment of contacts

among radical worker minorities outside the workplace as well as links with revolutionaries who were not workers (interestingly enough, the Stalinist trade union *CGT* used this very same 'workerist' argument to denounce all attempts by the committees to approach the striking workers of several enterprises).

Prior to that, *ICO* had been critiqued on several occasions, fraternally at first, and subsequently with increasing severity, by the Situationist International. In September 1969, René Riesel summed things up as follows in the final issue of *Internationale Situationniste*:

> Some present-day organizations cunningly pretend not to exist. This enables them to avoid bothering with the slightest clarification of the bases on which they assemble any assortment of people (while magically labelling them all 'workers'), to give no account at all to their semi-members regarding the *informal leadership* that holds sway, to spout nonsense and above all to indiscriminately condemn any theoretical expression and any other form of organization as evil and harmful beforehand. […] If we were to idealistically rely on the council 'concept' or, even more laughably, on the practical inactivity of *ICO*, to 'exclude all ideology' in the real councils, we should expect the worst, as we have seen that historical experience justifies no such optimism in this regard.[6]

Throughout the ensuing period *ICO* was continuously subjected to relentless critiques, more often than not by individuals and groups who had joined the network after May '68 and subsequently left it.[7] The most well known and incisive of these critiques was Jean Barrot's (aka Gilles Dauvé) 1969 text – published in Bilbao by Zero-zyx in 1976 under the title *Leninismo y ultraizquierda* – Leninism and the Ultra-Left. Three years later, in an article published in the first issue of the review *Le Mouvement Communiste* (April 1972)[8], Dauvé summarised the procedures

employed during the 1969 national reunion of *ICO* by the group's 'informal leadership' to avoid any debate whatsoever of the aforementioned text:

> Despite being explicitly directed against *ICO*, this text was at no time criticised by the members of *ICO* in the course of the debates. They left it to a group of 'anarchists' (we use this term for want of a better one, and without the pejorative nuance customary among Marxists) to attack us in the most indescribably confused manner. If Leninism hadn't existed, it would have had to have been invented then, as it constituted the only obvious element uniting all those assembled there. The official proceedings of the reunion subsequently reproduced the text, summing up the debate as if it had actually taken place. This way of dodging critique is all the easier given that *ICO* pretends not to be a 'group' with 'its own theory'. Nothing could be worse than the informal bureaucracy secreted by institutionalised democracy.
>
> […] Several examples prove that *ICO* as a 'mailbox' is a myth; the same applies to *ICO* as a space for 'debate'. In *ICO* one may debate anything but that which would call into question the very nature of the group.

Subsequently, perhaps to avoid any possibility of being lumped among the legions of 'modernist' intellectuals then indulging narcissistically in the self-promoting 'revolutionising of revolutionary theory for its own sake', Dauvé chose not to stress the significance of the theoretical innovations surrounding these splits. Perhaps, as Dauvé himself suggests, this should be interpreted as a 'sign of weakness on the part of the communist movement', or put down to what amounts to the same thing, i.e., that the period itself revolved much more around the death of the old than the birth of the new.[9] A large part of Dauvé's activity during those years, for example, revolved around settling

accounts with the past and simultaneously circulating the heritage of the Italian and Dutch-German Communist Lefts – largely made available through the efforts of Jacques Camatte's neo-Bordigist publication, *Invariance* – in order to contribute to a critique of the practical limitations encountered by revolutionaries immediately after May '68. Incidentally, this may also explain the fairly wide circulation (and translation) of Dauvé's writings among groups and individuals whose backgrounds, mindsets and activities are much more in line with the outlook of the old ultra-left (or of anarchism) than with that of latter-day proponents of 'communisation theory' like *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes*. In any case, at the time and for many years afterward, there seems to have been practically no awareness of the depth of the break that had taken place.

In the meantime, *ICO* came to the end of its tether in 1973 and *Échanges et Mouvement* was born in 1974–75 out of its surviving fragments and some of its international contacts. However, beyond the general emphasis on 'autonomy' as the defining characteristic that distinguished the 'New Movement' from the 'Old Movement' – a good way of hedging one's bets at a time when new social movements were constantly challenging the centrality of workers' identity – there doesn't seem to have been a very large degree of theoretical renewal involved in the transition from *ICO* to *Échanges*:

> *Échanges* is not a group in the traditional political sense of this word in the leftist milieu. The most accurate way to define it is to call it a 'network'. […]
>
> The contacts between these groups and individuals had existed before, and mostly for a long time. Quite a lot of other individuals scattered all over the Western world were connected to this core, the link between them being not only the group's publications or exchange of correspondence but also international meetings. One of these meetings had

> furnished the material for a pamphlet more or less giving the common position of the mentioned militants. This pamphlet, entitled 'The New Movement', was the ideological link between them. […]
>
> Those participating in this project decided not to bother with the clarification of standpoints held in common (which usually accompanies the birth of a new group) but to accept the existing tacit agreement. […].
>
> We have few fixed preconceived conceptions limiting our gathering of information or of analyses concerning the meaning of class conflicts today or the forms these conflicts will take in the future. It is not what workers think, even about their own struggles, that matters but what they actually do and the real meaning of their activity. We think we have to learn from these struggles and to consider their links with the general movement of struggles and with the situation of capitalism as a whole. So we despise using empty bluff, empty rhetoric or self-satisfying proclamations or offering 'advice' or 'lessons' to the workers. We see this attitude as an elitist conception seeking to use and dominate workers' struggles.[10]

Nonetheless, the crises of *ICO* and the subsequent founding of *Échanges* are worthy of attention due to the fact that both groupings were deeply affected by the crises involved in the origins of communisation theory, and because they were also the forerunners of the 'organisational approach' preferred by the majority of contemporary militant-activists: 'autonomy', a term whose meaning has evolved considerably over time. Initially, it indicated to the autonomy of workers from political parties and unions; it then went on to designate the autonomy of different fractions of the proletariat, such as women and ethnic minorities, from the 'working class' as a whole, and has finally ended up referring to

horizontally organised militant groupings which pursue 'autonomous' projects with little or no relation to the non-activist public and which call upon their fellow activists to democratically coordinate themselves in order to make separate spheres of activity (and activism) converge.

In a recent article, Dauvé makes some pertinent observations on the contemporary relevance of this approach, when party-building has been replaced by consciousness-building, and when the majority of activists have ceased to concentrate their efforts on recruiting and leading others but nonetheless continue to believe that, as depositaries of *consciousness*, they have a special mission to *inform*:

> *Informations & Correspondance Ouvrières* (1961–73), and now *Échanges & Mouvement* claimed to have no theory except the theory that only the proletarians could determine their own methods and aims. Likewise, thousands of infokiosks and indymedia collectives profess to have no specific doctrine (Marxist, anarchist, ecologist, feminist, whatever), and say their sole purpose is to serve as a meeting place and communication centre meant to promote social struggles, with the difference that the 'historical subject' is no longer the working class, but the people (the famous 99%). They act as if *ICO*'s 'choice of non-existence' (*IS*, No.11) had been inverted into the choice of 24/7 on-line presence, yet information remains the first priority, too often with similar features as 'bourgeois' media: constant data flow, information overload and obsolescence, sensationalism… .[11]

As a final note, it is worth mentioning *Nihilist Communism*, whose author, writing under the pseudonym of Monsieur Dupont, pins down the general continuity of these organisational and theoretical policies with the practices of 'mainstream leftism' and democratic politics when he points out that *Échanges*' approach

is not only 'modest', but also highly convenient for maintaining neighbourly relations with the revolutionary 'establishment':

> *Échanges* say that their 'activity [...] eventually might serve others as well', but they do not explore what this means in any real depth. One reason why *Échanges* do not seem to explore this aspect of their activity might be because the truth of what they must do, by their own logic, is to actually go against most of the 'revolutionary' communist and anarchist milieu. The difference between *Échanges* and the rest of the communist milieu is over the concept of 'consciousness', which *Échanges* almost completely reject. To take the logic of their position into the arena of the communist milieu, as an explicit argument, creates the risk of being totally rejected by that milieu. […] To go down this theoretical road leads to the realisation that in an important aspect there is little real difference between the projects of anarchism and most of communism and their supposedly deadly enemy, Leninism. If one is going to make this conclusion then one is going to lose most of ones 'friends' in the political milieu. *Échanges* seem to have tried to avoid this, and, indeed, because of this they have had some limited continuing respect amongst the communist milieu down the years. [12]

Between the *Situationist International* and *La Vielle Taupe*: The MIL

Given that the Spanish strike wave of the late '60's and early '70's was contemporary to the cycle of struggles from which early communisation theory originated, it stands to reason that there would have been at least some degree of contact between the Spanish revolutionaries of the time and the pioneers of contemporary communisation theory. Those responsible for this communication was none other than the members of the Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación (MIL), the 'armed agitation'

group whose unfortunate 'claim to fame' came from the execution of Salvador Puig Antich by the Spanish State in 1974. The MIL's history and activities are worthy of attention in themselves, as they illustrate the more general weaknesses and contradictions of the autonomous Spanish workers' movement of the early seventies.

Indeed, the MIL had close ties to this movement, which was breaking with the organisations of the Spanish Left in the late 60s. By deliberately choosing the term 'armed agitation' to dissociate themselves from the notion that they might constitute some sort of 'armed vanguard', the group wished to show that it had no intention of 'leading' the revolution and that the only purpose of the hold-ups that the group resorted to was to finance activities destined to support working class struggles in the Barcelona area. However, given that they expected 'armed nuclei' like their own to proliferate within the workers' movement and 'accelerate' the class struggle, it cannot be denied that, contrary to what they themselves thought, they clearly did have a vanguardist conception of their role. Indeed, whereas Leninists sought to introduce 'politics' into so-called 'economic' struggles, the MIL wished to 'radicalise' such struggles by providing them with their 'example' and supplying them with expropriated funds.

Eventually, the contradiction between the project initiated in 1969 and the reality of what the MIL had become – a group of specialised professional revolutionaries – was challenged from within its ranks, and in August 1973 the group announced its dissolution in a public document which stated, among other things: '[…] organization, politics, militantism, moralism, martyrs, acronyms, our own label, now belong to the Old World'. Unfortunately, though, the authors of this document considered the disbanding of the group more as a means of avoiding 'recuperation' and stardom than as a self-critique of their previous practice. Instead of concluding that permanent nuclei specialising in violence were superfluous, they considered that henceforth

such nuclei were to act 'autonomously': i.e., in an informal, diffuse and decentralised way.

Despite its overall 'situationist' theoretical outlook and its illusions regarding 'armed agitation', the MIL was clearly influenced to some degree by the predecessors of contemporary communisation theory, as witnessed in the correspondence between the group and the members of The Vielle Taupe bookshop in Paris. As Sergi Rosés Cordovilla states in 'Un esbozo de la historia del MIL' ('A Sketch of the History of the MIL'):

> It is undeniable that the theoretical inspiration of the MIL is to be found here [in council communism, Bordigism and Situationism] and not in anarchism, as so often has been repeated and still is. And this theoretical evolution of the group, the key figure of which is Santi Soler, is where another important but also much ignored factor in the history of this experience turns up, namely, the role of clarification and theoretical guidance played in relation to the MIL by the members of the informal group that met at the La Vielle Taupe bookshop in Paris. This bookshop was not only the main source of the theoretical texts which influenced the MIL; its members, especially Pierre Guillaume and above all Jean Barrot, became the main interlocutors for the discussion of theoretical matters. Barrot established a prominent relationship with Santi Soler and was a constant influence when it came to theoretical issues, and even played a part during the self-dissolution of the group in 1973.[13]

Indeed, it is surprising that in the substantial body of literature dealing with the history of the MIL, no one seems to have pointed out to date that one of the most often quoted phrases of the group, 'organization is the organization of tasks', appeared for the first time in the very same article of *Le Mouvement Communiste* (April, 1972) in which Dauvé had critiqued *ICO* and worker's democracy, as well as the dead end of organisational

fetishism and of political (i.e., competitive) 'attitudes' in relations among revolutionaries. In fact, Rosés Cordovilla, undoubtedly the most serious and thorough historian of the MIL, not only erroneously attributes this phrase to Santi Soler but also makes matters worse by contrasting its real author's 'Bordigist influence' – supposedly expressed in his 'continued use of the term 'party' – to Soler's organisational positions.[14]

Certainly, none of the other autonomous groups then extant and active in Spain or in the years that immediately followed ever ventured as far as to question the concepts of revolutionary organisation or class consciousness; on the other hand, it is also true that, unlike the French and Italian groups *Négation* and *Ludd*, for example, the MIL never explicitly proclaimed 'the end of the workers' movement', a prospect that might have seemed somewhat premature during the heyday of the assembly movement, as in Spain, in contrast to what was happening in France and Italy, radical non-workplace based struggles were still a rarity.

In light of this, it is tempting to compare the 'accelerationist' activities and outlook of the MIL with the way that events developed elsewhere, particularly in Italy, where, as subversive energies began to ebb in the workplace, many revolutionaries began to stress non-workplace struggles in the sphere of reproduction while autonomising themselves from the industrial working class and simultaneously adopting an 'immediatist' perspective oriented toward 'living communism' in the here and now. This led some of these groupings to theorise illegalist practices as the most coherent form of the refusal of work (as opposed to the MIL's perspective, in which such practices were justified in the name of 'supporting' workers' struggles and bringing revolution closer). Paradoxically, in the Italian context, the Situationist-inspired critique of 'sacrifice' paved the way for the replacement of militant morality with abstract requirements of 'radicality', within the framework of an increasingly individualist ideology of 'autonomy'. As a result, the tasks of social transformation –whose realisation had been subject until then to the success of the revolutionary process as a whole

– were now vested upon the individual's 'capacity' to critique everyday life and the degree to which he or she had 'broken' with 'the dominant way of life'. As revolutionary prospects continued to recede, this standpoint evolved toward a sectarian stance defined by its hostility to the working class – now considered 'counterrevolutionary' – the defence of delinquency as the only respectable way of survival and the submission of new members to initiation rites and 'radicality tests'.

In Spain, however, the timely 'transition to democracy' initiated in 1976 (i.e. the stabilisation of capital supported by the main political and trade union organisations of the left) cut short any potential convergence of workers' struggles with the emerging struggles in the sphere of reproduction and the 'critique of everyday life', which therefore, instead of prolonging an already contained proletarian offensive, were to bear the marked stamp of retreat and accommodation to the harsh reality imposed by political stabilisation and economic crisis. Thus the countercultural explosion closely linked to 'libertarian' magazines like *Ajoblanco*, *Star* or *Bicicleta* quickly merged with the advent of *desencanto* and *pasotismo*: a blend of disaffection indifference, hostility and cynicism toward the new institutions and the possibility of changing the world coupled with the attempt to avoid work as much as possible.

As the 'transition to democracy' got under way, many of those who had been involved in the autonomous workers' movement of the 1970s – including former members of the MIL – opted for 'critical' participation in the revival of the CNT, a collective self-defence stratagem which they somehow expected would spare them the cost of a historical defeat. This alone says a great deal about the limitations and illusions of the Spanish autonomous movement of the 1970s.[15] The result was a catastrophic fiasco, and by 1979 most of these individuals and groups had either left the organisation or been expelled from its ranks.

The MIL had no continuity, but part of its plan for a 'socialist library' was inherited by the *Etcétera* project and was

eventually published under the title 'Crítica de la política'. In fact, according to Sergi Rosés, during the mid-70s, ex MIL theorist Santi Soler was one of the founders of *Etcétera*. The influence of the forerunners of present-day communisation theory was evident both in the titles chosen for publication and in the brief theoretical introductions some of them were prefaced with (among others, *A World Without Money 1 & 2*, *Marx's Critical Notes on the Article: 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian'* , which had been translated by Jacques Camatte for the first series of *Invariance*, as well as a couple of articles by Bordiga under the heading *The Democratic Illusion*).

A good example of this influence appears in the caveat contained in the introduction to the 1979 *Etcétera* pamphlet, *Apuntes sobre la autonomía obrera* ('Notes on Worker's Autonomy'), a collection of texts on the subject of 'autonomy', then very much in vogue, which included a translation of Henri Simon's 'The New Movement', as well as a text by *Collegamenti* on the Italian movement of 1977:

> If we were to pay attention to the period of growing disenchantment among the activists we see around us and its deeper meaning, we would understand that the phenomenon taking place before our eyes is exactly the opposite of an ALTERNATIVE. AUTONOMY is not so much the preliminary step but the result that will soon have to be taken into account by those who still insist on following the path of politics, regardless of the fact that those politics may be autonomous or libertarian.

However, from its very inception the Barcelona group that in 1983 began publishing a bulletin called *Etcétera,* despite some seemingly early affinities with *La Guerre Sociale,* embraced an eclectic theoretical mix which combined the views of the old councilist ultra-left (now largely converted to the gospel of 'autonomy') with the anti-technological views of publications such

as *Fifth Estate* and *Radical Science*.[16] Thus there is no continuity between the *Etcétera* group's 'Crítica de la política' series – which clearly attests to the influence of the predecessors of communisation theory – and the opinions voiced in the *Etcétera* bulletin, which beyond the adherence to a generic 'autonomous' standpoint and unless otherwise stated, must be strictly considered (as is also the case with *Échanges et Mouvement*) as individual points of view.

The last major instance of the influence of early communisation theory for almost two decades appeared in *Marxismo: señas de identidad*[17] ('Marxism: Identity Traits'), a brief book written in 1980 by former MIL theorist Santi Soler. Written in a lively and accessible style, and openly presented as an attempt to soberly reckon with the defeat of the 60s generation, the book simultaneously attempted to uphold the 'use-value' of Marxist theory from a 'libertarian' standpoint. Besides introducing the reader to Bordiga and the situationists, Soler intersperses his commentary with frequent quotes from Dauvé and references to Camatte and the *Etcétera* project. Speaking of the theory of separate consciousness as an alibi for justifying the power of political rackets, Soler says:

> But there are subtler ways of establishing forms of separate knowledge, apparently non-ideological forms. […] If the issue of class consciousness does not refer to practical activity, to the real life of the working class, if it implies some sort of intellectualism or separate knowledge, it is immaterial if the disguise it covers itself with is Lukács or Lenin. […]
>
> Precisely beneath the young Lukács lurks the Bolshevik-Leninist nightmare, beneath consciousness as separate theory what we really find is separate power or its ultimate justification. […]

What lurks, therefore, behind all these pretexts –'socialist theory', 'class consciousness', 'workers' autonomy', 'council organization', etc.– has nothing to do with the self-realisation of the proletariat: the latter inevitably entails its self-suppression.

> […] There are no valid pretexts to make us admit any other organizational notions other than the mere 'organization of tasks'. No militants, no acronyms and, of course, no martyrs or myths […] Organization is the organization of tasks: as simple as that.

After that, nothing relative to the likes of Dauvé and co. would be published in Spain for almost twenty years, until the publishing house Klinamen, which originated in 2003 from the Madrid anarchist milieu of the time, began to rediscover and publish texts on the proletarian movements of the 70s.

The Present Moment: After the 15-M and the 'Indignados'

One of the main consequences of the 15-M movement was that both the issue of the limitations of self-organisation and those of politics have been simultaneously posed anew, although under vastly changed conditions. The novel forms of protest that came to the fore in May 2011 represent a first mass response to the restructuring of the capital relation that began in the 1980s, which slowly shifted the centre of gravity of social struggles from the terrain of production to the sphere of reproduction and is ultimately at the root of the present political crisis.[18] Although they seem to lack the dynamism historically associated with labour struggles and remain cross-class and political in character, these struggles have involved a growing mass of the surplus population, the unemployed, and the precariously employed.

This proliferation of self-organised movements denouncing really existing politics in the name of a generalised demand for political and economic reform came into being just a few months before a denationalised State amended the Spanish Constitution to

incorporate fiscal, monetary and social protection policies in order to comply with European Union deficit and debt stipulations, and thus make the slightest reform impossible. Indeed, the present political crisis was, for all practical purposes, unleashed from above by the ruling class in order to accelerate neoliberal policies. Consequently, the projects of 'political reform' now vying for power in Spain are hamstrung in advance and it will no doubt be enlightening to see what actual role they are carving out for themselves in the immediate future.

Nonetheless, the 15-M movement and its offshoots must be thanked for making it increasingly clear that self-organisation and autonomy no longer constitute a revolutionary perspective, but the limits which the proletariat will come up against again and again as the crisis deepens and it is forced to struggle for its reproduction. Moreover and unintentionally, by palpably proving that the bulk of the categories of the radical critique of the 1960s now play the role of a harmless diversion that does not really point beyond the political framework of radical democratism, they have made an enormous contribution to the clarification of the present situation.

A good case in point was the demand for 'real democracy', opposed by the 15-M's radical minority with the slogan 'all power to the assemblies'. To some extent, this expressed the deadlock between the 'reformist' and 'radical' sectors of the movement over the effort to affirm a common belonging (the choice being between the 'citizen' or a mystified 'working class'), but the truth is that this deadlock only served to mask a deeper underlying unity. In fact, what the dynamics of the movement of occupied squares and its aftermath have actually evidenced was the increasing meaninglessness of such an alternative, since a constituting identity, organised around the working class or otherwise, was no longer really available. Having said that, it is completely beyond activism's possible range of vision that the class struggle might be the process whereby an essentially segmented class engages with its contradiction to capital. Therefore, the illusion of generality

nurtured by activism, whether in the form of the myth of a general political self-organisation or that of specific struggles gradually overcoming their separation and converging, is now increasingly bankrupt and must eventually implode along with activism itself.

In fact, 'all power to the assemblies' has now become the common watchword, not just of a few workerist diehards, but of all those forces wishing to perpetuate politics in every sphere of life and turn the entirety of social existence into a 'management problem'. There is no essential reason why this 'radical' standpoint and the perspectives of those who have rallied around Podemos, for example, should be forever at odds. They are already united in the search for solutions to the present crisis in the form of 'people's power', regardless of whether the instrument of that power is to be a democratically 'reformed' national State or 'pure' direct democracy from below, a combination that is not exactly unheard of.

In the interim separating the 15-M from the present moment, the struggles developing in Spain have moved forward in modest but important respects. The Marches of Dignity that arrived in Madrid in March 2013, for example, were witness to the overthrow of the long-established relationship between mass demonstrations and rioting. One of the main bones of contention that had plagued the 15-M movement, i.e., the zeal with which the majority took it upon itself to identify and hand over supposedly 'violent' individuals to the police, finally came to an end.

Then, in January 2014, the Gamonal riots, which erupted in Burgos over the opposition of a working class neighbourhood to the cost of the city council's intended redevelopment of the area's main street while expenditures on social spending plummeted, led to widespread solidarity demonstrations throughout the country, which marked a turning point as working class youth, the urban poor and ordinary citizens took to the streets in more than thirty cities. There were clashes with the police in Madrid for two consecutive nights, while in Barcelona, 'sound cannons' were deployed for the first time in order to disperse the thousands

of protesters who marched through the city centre on January 17, erecting barricades, smashing bank windows and attacking a police station.

Just a few months later, towards the end of May, serious riots broke out in Barcelona when the occupied social centre of Can Vies, located in the historic working class neighbourhood of Sants, was evicted. For the next six days and nights thousands upon thousands of local residents, young and old, workers and unemployed, took to the streets. By Friday evening, there had been protests in over forty different neighbourhoods and towns, as well as rioting in Gracia, Sant Andreu, Noubarris and other neighbourhoods.

Once again, as opposed to what had so often been the case in previous years, no condemnation of 'violence' was issued, nor was any wedge driven between 'good' and 'bad' protest. The only line drawn was the line between institutional violence and those determined to resist it.

Both the mass movements and the riots we see developing now are two aspects of the same crisis of reproduction. 'Peaceful demonstrations' break out into riots because struggles over immediate demands are constantly met with repressive action by the police, which has now become a fundamental moment of the reproduction of the class relation, as exemplified in the Protection of Public Safety Bill passed by the government in November 2013.[19] Meanwhile, real wages have dropped substantially, poverty and malnutrition are on the rise and hundreds of thousands of people unable to keep up mortgage payments have been evicted. To sum up, the current conjuncture is one of deepening economic woes for most people, contempt and bitter distrust for a political establishment unceasingly involved in new corruption scandals, a questioning of many if not most institutions, and an increasingly exasperated and insubordinate population.

What for some time seemed to be absent from this scenario were precisely workplace struggles. However, over the last two years workers of many different sectors – despite the fact

that struggles remain localised and are usually defensive – have increasingly gone on strike, and some of these strikes have been quite successful, which also represents a reversal of the prevailing trend for many years. The 'White Tide' set up to oppose hospital cuts and privatisations scored a spectacular victory in Madrid, after its strikes and protests forced the courts to intervene to prevent six hospitals from being privatised.[20] Nonetheless, workers' struggles are not converging with 'social movements'. This underlines one of the stumbling blocks of the present situation, namely, that struggles in the sphere of reproduction remain separate from struggles in production. Only a qualitative leap will allow struggles to go beyond demands in both spheres and pose the matter of the very reproduction of class relations.

As Théorie Communiste write:

> The supersession of really existing self-organisation will not be accomplished by the production of the 'true', the 'right', the 'good' self-organisation; it will be achieved against really existing self-organisation, but within it, from it.[21]

As long as class confrontation fails to positively initiate the communisation of society i.e., the appropriation of the means of subsistence, communication and transport for the purpose of simultaneously attacking capital and abolishing the proletariat, self-organisation and defensive struggles will remain the only available form of action. However, the qualitative leap between one stage and the other will not be prefigured by the coming into being of some form of political unity amongst proletarians, but by the proliferation of rifts within existing struggles and conflictual encounters between different practices, such as those that will arise around the issue of gender. In order to really unite, proletarians will have to truly go beyond this society and concretely abolish their separation by relating as individuals to one another outside of the terms of the class relation.

Theorising upon events does not necessarily allow one to anticipate what these will be, and the spreading of an idea, however brilliant it may seem, can neither produce a revolution nor hasten its arrival. Theory is merely a necessary moment of the self-critical character of really existing struggles, and therefore partakes of their contradictory nature. Far from invalidating it, the acceptance of the incomplete nature of communisation theory is what allows it to be adequate to that which it describes. Disseminating the concept of communisation, then, has little or nothing to do with revealing to the 'real movement' what it 'truly' is, not to mention with the quixotic venture of going about trying to 'raise consciousness'. This is not to say, however, that the possible production of communism is alien to strengthening the ties between increasingly self-critical struggles and the rootedness of a revolutionary theory.

1

http://libcom.org/library/correspondence-between-parts-of-the-riff-raff-collective-and-gilles-dauve

2

For a thorough account of the global history of this transition, see Bruno Astarian, *Eléments sur la périodisation du MPC: histoire du capital, histoire des crises, histoire du communisme*, Hic Salta, 1998, http://www.hicsalta-communisation.com/hic-salta-98/elements-sur-la-periodisation-du-mpc-histoire-du-capital-histoire-des-crises-histoire-du-communisme

3

For more on this transition in the Spanish context, see Loren Goldner's *Ubu Saved From Drowning: Worker's Insurgency and Statist Containment in Portugal and Spain, 1974–1977,* http://bthp23.com/Portugal-Spain.pdf

4

The older generation of the ultra-left, more aware of the potential dangers that the 'early communisers' critique represented for the existence and cohesion of their milieu, generally restricted itself to waging a war of silence and moderate polemics against them. However, when former members of La Vielle Taupe bookshop Pierre Guillaume and Dominique Blanc became involved in the 'Faurisson affair' and 'negationism' in 1978, large sections of the ultra-left (and the bourgeois press) pounced on the occasion to avenge themselves for past affronts and tar the entire milieu with the same brush.

5

Here is a brief extract from Henri Simon's somewhat cryptic account of *ICO*'s post-1968 history and demise: 'After 1968, the character of *ICO* had completely changed. The group had become more of a political organization with perhaps several hundred loose participants. The workers were a minority and voted with their feet as the discussions were moving very far from their struggles. Several tendencies were fighting to lead *ICO* toward a specific orientation and after four years it burst into several pieces.' Henri Simon, '1958–1998: Communism in France: Socialisme ou Barbarie, ICO and Échanges', https://libcom.org/article/1958-1998-communism-france-socialisme-ou-barbarie-ico-and-echanges

6

'Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization', available, http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/12.councils.htm. 'Préliminaires sur les conseils et l'organisation conseilliste' originally appeared in *Internationale Situationniste,* No.12, Paris, September, 1969. This translation by Ken Knabb is from the *Situationist International Anthology,* San Francisco: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006.

7

Francesco Santini's *Apocalypse and Survival* explains how some of these critiques found their way to Italy: 'In the first issue of *Ludd*, the minutes of the meeting held in Brussels by *Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières* in July 1969, at which almost all existing councilist currents were represented, were published. It featured the texts of the 'immediatists', who focused their practice on forms of the immediate realisation of the critique of everyday life (illegalism, immediate rejection of work, hedonism) and who had engaged in a harsh critique of the other groups at Brussels.' https://libcom.org/library/sections-8-102

8

'Ce que nous ne sommes pas, ce que nous ne voulons pas, et ou nous ne voulons devenir', http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article573

9

One might contrast Dauvé's lack of triumphalism during those years to many 'orthodox situationist' accounts of the struggles of the 1970's, as well as to the vague celebratory tone regarding the brave new world of 'autonomy' found in an otherwise symptomatic and sometimes stimulating text, Henri Simon's 'The New Movement' (1974): 'If one looks at the world today, one can see that revolution, in the Jacobin sense, is becoming progressively outdated, but that the revolutionary process itself is becoming more and more powerful.'

10

Échanges et Mouvement, 'What is Échanges et Mouvement as a Group?',

(undated), https://libcom.org/library/presentation-pamphlet-echanges-et-movement

11

Gilles Dauvé, 'The Bitter Victory of Council Communism', http://libcom.org/library/bitter-victory-council-communism-gilles-dauve

12

Monsieur Dupont, *Nihilist Communism: A Critique of Optimism in the Far Left*, Berkeley, CA: Ardent Press, 2009, p.21, available, https://libcom.org/library/nihilist-communism-monsieur-dupont

13

Sergi Rosés Cordovilla, 'Un esbozo de la historia del MIL', alasbarricadas.org, 2009, http://manuelhuerga.com/salvador/spip.php?article343. Dauvé summed up the French communist milieu's attitudes regarding the MIL in his text ' Violence et solidarité revolutionnaires ' (See http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article591). A Spanish translation is available in the volume *El 1000 y la OLLA: agitación armada, formación teórica y movimiento obrero en la España salvaje*, Editorial Klinamen, Madrid 2014.

14

Sergi Rosés Cordovilla, *El MIL: una historia política*, Alikornio Ediciones, Barcelona 2002, p. 232.

15

On the CNT revival and its results, see 'Algunos aspectos ideológicos de la actualidad española' in *Internacional Nexialist,* No.1 (La Banda de Moebius, Madrid, 1977), as well as *Los incontrolados, crónicas de la España salvaje 1976–1981*, http://klinamen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Incontrolados-klinamen.pdf

16

See radio interview with *Etcétera* member Carlos García Velasco in https://anabasisradioqk.org/2013/02/20/14-etcetera/

17

Ediciones Libertarias (Colección La Comuna), Madrid, 1980.

18

It would be highly advisable not to lose sight of the fact that the network methods and forms of the 15-M movement did not come out of nowhere, and also to keep in mind the strong resemblance they bear to those of the autonomous activists of the radical wing of the anti-war movement that played an important role in the Partido Popular government's ejection from power following the Madrid bombings of March 2004.

19

It is now illegal to participate in a demonstration before state institutions without prior notification of the relevant government office. Circulating riot images during demonstrations can also constitute an offence punishable by a €600,000 fine. Calling for demonstrations through the Internet, social networks, or any other means may also be penalised.

20

Esther Vivas, 'Spain: popular resistance delivers Results', https://www.alainet.org/en/articulo/82947

21

Théorie Communiste, 'Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome', https://libcom.org/article/self-organisation-first-act-revolution-it-then-becomes-obstacle-which-revolution-has

The Fantasy of Subsumption? Labour-Power and the Social (non-)Relation

—

Nadia Bou Ali

Commissioned some time after the Bilbao seminar, Nadia Bou Ali's text approaches the recent debate over subsumption between Théorie Communiste and Endnotes, and attempts to reconceptualise it critically through the recent work of Samo Tomšič on alienation drawing from the work of Jacques Lacan. From an original perspective this text seeks to revise and reassess the extent of 'capital's infringement on human society'.

The question of capitalist subsumption appears to be an unstated problematic for the left: it figures as a central concern in the general bleakness of communisation theory as well as in the cruel optimism of accelerationism. It also appears to be a site of contestation from within the general state of incapacity of all those committed to the analysis of the capitalist mode of production for the purposes of overcoming it. The debates around subsumption oscillate between understanding it in relation to different historical phases of capital, or as an expression of a logical contradiction that is necessary to the accumulation of value in capitalism. Within the debate around this issue between *Théorie Communiste* (TC) and Endnotes, theorising subsumption appears to be primarily concerned with identifying the fundamental processes of capital's infringement on human society for the purpose of thinking the constraints and possibilities of political action. This paper will argue that both positions complicate any attempt at a concrete formulation for 'political struggle', beyond one that posits the overcoming of an alienation that is construed as the direct result of society organised around capitalist relations. Endnotes for instance argue for the elimination of forced separations between individuals instilled by capital; the 'distinctions that mediate social relations'; and the abolition of 'the separations and ontological cleavages' that capital instills between 'human beings and their innermost capacities.'[1] By way of contrast, TC propose that the overcoming of capital entails the overcoming of the alienated state generated by a historically specific form of work and thereby of alienation construed as what results directly from capitalist mediation.[2] Moving beyond these two conceptions of alienation, this paper seeks to juxtapose to them Samo Tomšič's recent proposition for thinking alienation as a two-fold process of misrecognition in the social link: alienation as constitutive of the human subject's identification through a dialectic of (mis) recognition with the Other; and alienation constituted in social relations mediated by commodity fetishism.

Tomšič's formulation in *The Capitalist Unconscious* complicates any positive understanding of the social relation by positing the Lacanian social (non-)relation as a fundamental constitutive alienation that must be reckoned with by communist theory. The social (non-)relation presents the inherent limit or point of failure of any symbolic process for it is the crux of the fundamental (dis)identification co-substantive with the social link; i.e. there is a double inversion in capitalist society: the imaginary reflection that is constitutive of the human subject has a second layer of deformation; there is a second inversion or 'a symbolic torsion' in the imaginary reflection that can only be accounted for through the autonomy of value. The double inversion in fetishist disavowal, whereby an element is foreclosed only for it to return from without, gives rise to the question of negativity in the Marxian framework: or what Tomšič will call the constitutive alienation of the subject that is disavowed in capital for commodification to be possible. The constitutively alienated subject is precisely the one that capital must reject only for it to appear in fetishistic relations (constituted alienation).

In a time when leftist politics finds itself in an alliance with more traditional identitarian substantialist metaphysics that assume the subject (subject-positions, subjectivisation, etc.) as the agent and recipient of the possibility of overcoming capitalist relations, the psychoanalytic account of the subject as a self-relating negativity exposes the process of foreclosure of negativity at the core of the capitalist social link. Capital not only forecloses negativity but it is also supported by a fantasy of human life without negativity and thereby reproduces the very negativity it rejects. This structural negativity identified by both psychoanalysis and Marx is where 'revolutionary potential is to be located', and not in any specific consciousness because 'structure is immune to consciousness':[3]

> [T]he revolution cannot be a matter of finding new ways to mediate relations among workers, or between human beings and nature, the state and the economy, men and

> women, etc. Instead, the revolution can only be a set of acts that *abolish the very distinctions on which such mediations are based*. Capitalism *is a set of separations, or ontological cleavages* – between human beings and their innermost capacities – that are subsequently mediated by value and the state. To undo these mediations is to destroy the entities that underlie them: on the one hand to reconnect everyone to their capacities, in such a way that they can never be forcibly separated, and on the other hand, to empower each singular individual to take on or divest from any particular capacity, without thereby losing access to all the others.[4]
>
> It is this activity of man as an objective being, as mediation between individual and social activity, which may be defined as *work* when considered as an *abstraction* distinct from its particular historical forms. This is what the critique of work cannot produce, because the social relation which produces work is already contained in work itself. The great danger is to perform the 'speculative leap' which turns the concept as a *concretion of thought* into the concept as the dynamic of history itself, as that which would allow history to exist. *History never has to be produced*, it is always present, along with the clear-cut dividing line between concept and reality, the boundary of materialism. The theme of communist theory is not to explain why alienation has existed, but why it cannot go on existing.[5]

The crux of disagreement between TC and Endnotes appears to be anchored in the question of the extent and nature of the mediation of social relations. For TC real subsumption (in the post 60s historical period as they define it) totalises all aspects of social life through mediation. For Endnotes, subsumption, as a logical unity that is both formal and real, does not totalise all forms of social life because '[n]othing external to the *immediate production* process actually *becomes capital*.'[6] What both positions

ultimately share however, is a somewhat *positive* understanding of the social relation. TC look to the release of social relations from mediation, whereby consciousness (cognition) will somehow be entirely transformed, while Endnotes argue against the forms of socialisation enforced by capital for a notion of the social that is not centered on production: mediation will be 'fundamentally transformed with the end of asocial socialization.'[7] In both cases, the social relation is what has to be negated only for it re-emerge as an abstract negation of the negation; for Endnotes through the abolition of distinctions introduced by capital and the unleashing of inner capacities, i.e. unfettering human capacity from the production of needs for the valorisation of value results in the emergence of a new social relation that enriches man's inner capacities; or for TC through the abolition of alienation as it is produced through work or the wage-relation outside of which man is nothing and must be totally reconstituted.[8] In contradistinction, Tomšič maintains that the '"there is the social relation" is the unpronounced corollary of the neoliberal slogan, "there is no such thing as society".'[9] This implies that a determinate negation of capitalist alienation can only be thought if we accept that there is no activation of some inherent non-alienated form of human capacity; an initial stage to which we can retrogress, *and* that we are not simply a nothing outside of the contradiction of the wage relation: i.e the wage-relation is a historically specific form of restituting a negativity that is always already there, a radical antagonism of the Real, and that is the firm referent for symbolisation. The gap between the two registers is what sets in motion the contingency of historicisation.

For Tomšič capitalism has to be read as an abduction of the scientific revolution, in the face of which a materialist theory of the subject must be asserted through a recognition of the social relation as a non-relation that is structured around negativity, or what he defines as 'constitutive alienation'.[10] Subsumption in this reading is not premised on a historical periodisation by which primitive accumulation is understood as the transformation of

labour into wage labour, but as a transformation in the structure of enjoyment or *jouissance*. The new source of *jouissance* in capital, Tomšič argues, is labour-power as a unique 'commodity producing commodity'. In this reading, capital is a mode of production that is sustained by the logic of fantasy, or by a libidinal economy that generates a specific form of desire (surplus-enjoyment/surplus-value) whose subject is labour-power.

The constant demand for labour and surplus value in capital is read as homological to the psychoanalytic 'labour theory of the unconscious'[11]: the demand for labour in the unconscious does not produce enjoyment or pleasure, but a double production of a surplus object and an alienated subject. The dialectic of repression and satisfaction in the unconscious mechanisms, like that in capital, is never without an excess element: repression always constitutes the very repressed object that it presupposes retroactively. Tomšič argues that Marx's understanding of original accumulation as a structural relation, and not a historical phase of capitalism, repeats the Freudian analysis of repression: 'there is no accumulation of capital without a preceding production of surplus, but there is no production of surplus without the preceding accumulation of capital either.'[12]

Subsumption then is a fantasy that generates social bonds sustained by labour-power and labour-power is understood as the subject of exchange-value or of *jouissance*. Labour-power is a 'subjectivised negativity'[13] that cannot be understood by either empiricism or idealism, but only through a materialist analysis that locates the subject of politics in the 'tension between abstraction and negativity.'[14] Tomšič maintains that labour power, understood as the fantasy of quality sustaining use-value, is ultimately a negativity that can only be identified through Marx-Lacan precisely because they both uncover 'the immanent breaks in existing social appearances.'[15] Capital forecloses negativity, i.e. labour-power is productive only when the knowledge of its negativity is repressed. Moreover, this understanding of labour-power is posited in direct contradiction to traditional Marxism which

relies on a notion of consciousness, for it is premised on understanding labour-power as a negativity, or an empty signifier, that represents the subject for another signifier – the drive for accumulation.

Consequently, in Tomšič's reading, periodisation cannot be understood historically, for history is only a history of structure that is characterised by instability (surplus-value and value are inseparable, original accumulation is homological to primal repression). Marx and Lacan are thus necessary for understanding the capitalist social bond, as being a specific form of distortion of appearance that generates consistencies such as class struggle; i.e. class struggle and the unconscious are not transhistorical essences but appear as such as 'manifestations of structural contradictions in social *and* subjective reality.'[16] In Tomšič's analysis, Capital is understood as a 'universal madness' that exploits the negativity of social links and replaces the non-relational bonds of the alienated human animal with commodification. He thus calls for a return to structural analysis that takes account of the subject as 'constitutively alienated' and for an affirmation and mobilisation of the subversive dimensions of modern science for the realisation of political modernity *against* capital.[17]

Tomšič's challenge to politics structured around consciousness, as well as his insistence that there cannot be a political struggle without reactivating science in a radical manner re-introduces the subject of politics as the subject of science into Marxist analysis. This subject of politics is irreducible to the party or to any form of programmatism that posits itself as a privileged embodiment of presupposed historical knowledge. For the party makes the question of the truth (the truth of alienated subjectivity) disappear to replace it with a knowledge that promises some form of self-realisation. Tomšič's intervention deserves attention because it undermines Eurocentrism and any form of identity politics. The unconscious has no home and there is no principle of identity in psychoanalysis. Here lies the importance of this theoretical intervention into worn-out Eurocentric debates

on the left that have not ceased to oscillate between assuming colonisers' guilt and identity fetishism or the fetishisms of particularity, and which have completely lost sight of the universal both in Europe and beyond. Furthermore, we can ask what has the focus on the analysis of failures of concrete historical struggles generated besides the old paradigm of history as *historia magistra vitae,* through which we can only learn lessons from past failed struggles in a manner that ultimately culminates in historicising capital's victory? It is not enough to endorse an open struggle against capital through which the horizons of political action are headless riots and revolts: what is required is a consistent subversion of the praxis of interpretation, a struggle in theory against spontaneous capitalist philosophy that professes the existence of a social relation (freedom, equality, property and Bentham) without society (neoliberalism). Tomšič's rejoinder to this is that Marx's claim that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle' has to be read to mean: history does not exist.[18] It is only labour-power and surplus-value that exist, and it is only by identifying the former as the negativity in structure that politics can re-emerge. According to Tomšič's argument, politics must be understood as what emerges from the realisation of labour-power as the site of appearance and disappearance of capital, i.e. labour-power is the fiction through which the 'subject is misrepresented and fictionalised as a positive vital force', while the negative production of indebted subjects and surplus populations are left without a trace.[19]

Théorie Communiste and Endnotes

Théorie Communiste argue that theorising subsumption historically is essential for understanding the transformations in programmatism in Europe in the past century. They maintain that the analysis of subsumption and its class effects manifests in the nature of political struggle during the different periods of subsumption: real and formal subsumption are understood historically. TC argue that a periodisation of subsumption manifests itself

in worker's movements *and* that there is an absence of analysis of subsumption that has in turn caused incapacity in political action. The problem of subsumption in these debates raises two different sets of questions, one related to the analytic import of this concept, whether it is a concept that can generate a determinate negation of capital, and another, whether the determinate negation of capital is the abolition of value generating labour for the purpose of instituting an unmediated social bond?

For Théorie Communiste, the historical development of capital or its periodisation is understood as being 'essentially, the history of contradiction between the proletariat and capital'[20], i.e. as a contradiction between the forces and relations of production. TC maintain this view for the specific purpose of theorising a period of transformation of the mode of production:

> It is clear that the transition from one phase of real subsumption to another cannot have the same scope as the transition from formal to real subsumption, but we cannot be satisfied with the mere positing of a continuity between the two phases of real subsumption. Change would then be the mere elimination of archaisms; transformation would then ultimately be merely formal, and would fundamentally alter nothing in the contradiction between proletariat and capital. Even the very notion of a crisis between the two phases would disappear.[21]

In their reading TC locate the problematic of programmatism in the shift from the period of formal subsumption of labour by capital, characterised by the extraction of absolute surplus-value, to that of the phases of real subsumption, characterised by the extraction of relative surplus-value. This shift for TC is defined by the onset of wage labour and loss of the 'autonomy' of 'the reproduction of labour-power'.[22].The difference between formal and real subsumption for TC can be summarised as follows: the process of production does not distinguish between value-creating

labour and surplus-value creating labour, this distinction is established with 'the first moment of exchange (the purchase and sale of labour-power)', i.e. the production process is one in which the extraction of absolute surplus-value is necessary for the production of surplus-value and results in the production of value, and it somehow historically precedes the moment of real subsumption from which the history of class struggle proceeds. For *TC*, capital remains an external force to labour in formal subsumption, thus it is only in this phase that

> for the proletariat, revolution means its own liberation, its affirmation. The proletariat is therefore [under formal subsumption] in a position to confront capital with what it is *within it*, i.e., to liberate itself from capitalist domination and to turn labour into the basis of social relations between all individuals, to make it their community, to liberate productive labour, to take control of the means of production and to free itself from the anarchy of capitalism and private property. The proletariat's liberation is to be founded on a mode of production based upon abstract labour, i.e. upon value.[23]

Now, in the period of real subsumption, TC argue, 'the reproduction of labour-power loses all autonomy in relation to the reproduction of capital' and 'labour is no longer the dominant element in the immediate process, the production process becomes adequate to the absorption of living labour by dead labour, the social unity of capitals is fixed by exchange at production prices […] and the defence of the proletarian condition now becomes a mere moment of the self-presupposition of capital.'[24]

Thus, formal subsumption occurs *historically* when the labour process is geared towards the production of labour-power, labour becomes value producing, and real subsumption is the transformation of all social relations, whereby the reproduction of labour-power is integrated into a capitalist world-market: 'real

subsumption is the transformation of society and not of the labour process alone.'[25] Further, TC maintain that while formal subsumption transforms pre-capitalist society according to the needs of capital, real subsumption is 'organic' and 'proceeds from its own presuppositions in order to create for itself the organs it needs: this is how it becomes a totality.'[26] This organic nature of the historical phase of subsumption is different from real subsumption, which is understood by TC as a non-dialectical ground zero or blank point from which the dialectical process begins. Ultimately, what real subsumption reproduces is labour-power while formal subsumption subsumes labour for the purpose of the valorisation of value itself. In this analysis the value-form is produced on the level of formal subsumption while labour-power is produced at the level of real subsumption.

In response to the TC thesis that insists on the historicity of subsumption – understood as a relation between the proletariat and capital – as an ongoing process in capital, Endnotes maintain that an analysis which relies on a *historical* periodisation of subsumption in terms of transitions of capital falls short of grasping the fundamental *logical* contradiction of capital as that of the value-form. Subsumption, Endnotes argue in their reading of Marx's *Capital,* is the process by which 'the particularities of the labour-process' are brought 'under the abstract universality of the valorisation-process of capital.'[27] Endnotes invoke the critique of Hegel's arguments about sovereignty in the *Philosophy of Right* where Marx argues that Hegel ascribes philosophical categories to objective social processes, by which an executive sovereign subsumes the individual and particular under the general. For Marx, Hegel gives objective conditions their logical structure, without asking 'Is this the rational, the adequate mode of subsumption?'[28] Endnotes's reading of Marx's argument for subsumption is as the process through which:

> The abstract universal – value – whose existence is posited by the exchange abstraction, acquires a *real* existence

> vis-à-vis particular concrete labours, which are subsumed under it. The real existence of abstractions, which acquire the ability to subsume the concrete world of production under them – and posit themselves as the truth of this world – is for Marx nothing other than a perverted, enchanted, ontologically inverted reality.[29]

While TC locate subsumption in two phases: the transformation of 'work' into 'waged-labour' and the reproduction of labour-power, Endnotes maintain that 'the labour-process in both real and formal subsumption *is* the immediate production process of capital. Nothing comparable can be said of anything beyond the production process, for it is only production which capital claims as its own.'[30] The unity between production and circulation, which TC maintain as separate spheres by positing subsumption as a historical periodisation, is itself the unity of the 'valorisation process in capital in its entirety'; i.e. for Endnotes 'nothing external to the immediate production process actually *becomes* capital nor, strictly speaking, is subsumed under capital.'[31] Ultimately, Endnotes reject the distinction between formal and real subsumption that TC posit as one of historical periodisation and argue that subsumption is not an adequate analytic category for grasping 'the development of the totality of the capitalist class relation.'[32]

Now, while TC maintain that communism can only be produced by locating the contradiction within capital through a historicisation of class struggle based on the periodisation of subsumption, Endnotes argue that the fundamental contradiction of capital cannot be analysed in terms of class but in terms of the value-form itself. TC maintain that Marx's very own analysis of labour as an objectifying activity is only possible from within the context of capital, and is necessary for Marx's own programmatism which they read as a project that pivots on abstract labor itself:

> this labour, in its most general form, as an abstraction, possesses no reality beyond the capitalist mode of production. Marx 'slips' from this abstraction which defines labor in general to work as an ontological 'eternal activity'. *The generality of abstract labor which, thus invested with a concrete content, not only authorizes this generality, but also becomes 'eternal', ontological labour. We are now at the heart of programmatism.*[33]

Capital in TC's reading generates the conditions for its own overcoming; capital is then what makes programmatism possible: capital instantiates the difference between the 'living labour-power in a purely subjective form, that is, as a living individual, as the worker's physical expenditure' and 'abstract labour' which 'also presents itself as labour in the anthropological sense of the word, and as such, is valid for all modes of production.'[34] TC, however, proceed to define abstract labour as eternal labour that cannot be deduced from wage labour; this is the grounds from which they posit eternal labour as work and wage labour as non-work. The necessity of this distinction for their framework is to maintain social relations that are not mediated: 'communist revolution puts an end to and supersedes the old mode of activity by producing the social immediacy of the individual and the coincidence of material life and personal assertion.'[35] The re-introduction of class-struggle for TC is now anchored in the 'self-transformation of individuals' for the production of the 'immediacy of the individual.'[36] This immediacy of the individual has to do with making possible human activity, or work, as opposed to labour:

> Despite the fact that in the *Grundrisse,* the *Unpublished Chapter,* and *Capital*, Marx continues speaking of the alienation of labor, the alienation of labor is itself explained by the relations of production; it describes a situation, it exists within capital's production relations. It is no longer the origin unfolding and giving rise to all else. It no longer

> revolves around the essence of man, but around historically determined social relations in which the worker is separated entirely or partly from his working conditions, the product of his activity and his activity itself.[37]

Thus, for TC, we find that production can be restored to the immediate activity of man against its mediation by capital. However, which production are we talking about after the existing advancement of means of production by capital? What of the moving contradiction of capital, what of the alienated social forms of the commodity and value that capitalism makes possible? Must all these be abolished or re-appropriated in order to free man from the ruse of production? Do we need a positive account of work to overcome capital or an account of determinate negation of labour from the standpoint of capital itself?

It appears that for TC, the abolition of class belonging is ultimately the abolition of external constraint on social action and is the condition for what they call non-mediated social relations. Ultimately, the question that is being raised but never stated as such by either position can be formulated as: who is the subject of politics? While Endnotes and value-form analysts more generally posit capital as a subject of history, albeit a subject that does not necessarily know itself, a subject that is not a Hegelian *Geist*, Théorie Communiste can be seen to regard the proletariat as a subject 'supposed to know', i.e. a subject of politics that must now acquire its knowledge as a class whereby this knowledge dismantles the class relations in capital. Both ends of the debate risk falling into fetishisation, either that of capital, self-valorising value, or the proletariat. The debate between TC and Endnotes can ultimately be read as a debate about the possibility of politics in capitalism: while the former maintain that communisation has to be a revolution in social relations by establishing communist relations through the overcoming of class consciousness instantiated by capitalist relations (which is practiced in terms of a return to communalism), the latter argue staunchly against any class-based

analysis and situate the core of the Marxian critique in commodity fetishism and the mediation of abstract labour by value. Although Endnotes disagree with TC on the historical periodisation of subsumption, they depict subsumption as a process that is generated by social practices, which in turn produce the real abstractions of capital. If the subject of politics cannot be reduced to the working class nor to capital itself, then where is the subject to be located under capitalist subsumption?

The Social (non-)Relation

Tomšič argues that capital colonises the unconscious and forces itself as a symbolic structure on conscious subjects. The logic of production in capital read through Marx and psychoanalysis is not only non-homeostatic, it is driven by a logic of excess: the double character of the commodity produces an object that is irreducible to the classical ontological opposition of being and non-being; this object is surplus-value, which corresponds to the surplus-jouissance, or to *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle in the Freudian and Lacanian schema. The capitalist rejection of negativity, its rejection of castration through commodification, and its demands of perversion from its subjects (subjects who are supposed to enjoy exploitation) cannot be conceived as a self-totalising vicious circle. As a critique of Heidegger, Tomšič argues that ontology is not simply about being and non-being but is precisely about the production within being of more than being.[38] He thereby undermines ontology understood as the hypothesis of the univocity of being through the equivocity of matter: the focus on difference, metonymy, and homology pits Plato against Aristotle, Heraclitus against Parmenides, Saussure against Aristotle, and Freud and Lacan against Reich and Marcuse all through asserting a relationship of material implication between Marx and Lacan.[39]

This production of what is more than being in being is premised on an understanding of society and the social relation as negativity. There is no social relation, or, in other words, society

is essentially grounded on the inexistence of the social relation and the social link is alienation from the beginning: there is a 'constitutive alienation' that comes to be distorted by capital and commodity fetishism as forms of 'constituted alienation'. This dual alienation can only be conceived in a world mediated by the commodity form, which Tomšič reads as homological to Lacan's 'autonomous signifier'. The importance of psychoanalysis for politics or the homology between Marx and Lacan can only be attained via a non-humanist, non-idealised reading of Marx on one hand and a refusal of pessimistic apolitical readings of Lacan on the other: the critique of political economy precedes and conditions psychoanalysis logically, politically, and epistemologically.[40] Both Marx and Lacan reintroduce the subject – a de-psychologised, de-individualised subject – into structure through a 'materialist interpretation' which identifies 'a structural negativity' that is foreclosed by the capitalist worldview.

Tomšič argues that in the face of existing liberal, neoliberal and identitarian politics – or 'politics of the narcissistic subject' – that have each fixated on the sole realm of representation (and through which revolutionary language has been neutralised), we need Lacan and Marx precisely because they posit the subject of modern politics as the very subject of modern science. This subject can only be understood as an alienated animal, a non-narcissistic subject that already includes its other. And this non-narcissistic subject cannot be the objectified subject existing under capitalism, which in turn reserves for itself the sole role of subject of history. The best trick that capitalism has played, Tomšič argues, is its presentation of itself in the image of the universe of modern science: infinite, disclosed, and unstable.

> if modern science abolished the ancient division of the superlunary and sublunary world, capitalism willingly adopted the scientific thesis: there is, indeed, only one world, the global market, which brings the 'stars down to Earth'

> rejecting the divide of social reality between a 'superlunary' feudal and religious master and the 'sublunary' serf.[41]

The paradoxical move of capitalism is that it re-installs the same divide that it overcomes in another register:

> [C]apitalism reinstalled the division in the superlunary sphere, now inhabited by the capitalist abstractions subjected to mathematisation, which would, ideally, provide their future predictability, and the sublunary sphere, where a contingent and non-mathematical interplay of particular interests and political manipulations takes place. The highest sphere (financial capital) continues to move all other spheres of human production.[42]

This paradoxical core of capital restores the pre-modern soul in the form of fetishism: the fetishism of the commodity; the fetishism of the economy as subject supposed to know; and the fetishism of identity as a positive attribute.

Capital not only forecloses negativity but it is also supported by a fantasy of human life without negativity and thereby reproduces the very negativity it rejects. In psychoanalysis, the negativity that is brought forth lies in Lacan's correction of structural linguistics through the isolation of the signifier from the sign and the introduction of the subject of the unconscious. While for Marx, in Tomšič's reading, the negativity is to be located in labour-power as the subject of exchange-value. Marx made a move homologous to psychoanalysis by identifying the 'logic of the signifier', of labour-power through the analysis of capital as an autonomous system of differences. Tomšič argues that Lacan, in his theory of language, posits the signifier as matter transcending itself into language, as a contingent element without which language would be unthinkable, and thereby rejects both conventionalism and neuro-linguistics which understand language as an organ of communication.

> Lacan's materialist theory of the signifier echoes Marx's description of commodity as a sensusal suprasensual thing, where the same act of transcendence, the articulation of materiality (commodities) into (commodity) language, is at stake. And just as the transcendence of the signifier produces a metonymic subject and an ungraspable object of jouissance, the transcendence of commodities transforms labour into labour-power and situates surplus-value as the privileged object-cause in the capitalist social link.[43]

Tomšič posits use-value and exchange-value as respectively 'qualities without matter' and 'matter without qualities' and it is through the difference between them that commodities emerge as 'non-empirical materialities'. However, Tomšič's analysis of the commodity form departs from value-form analysis: for he argues that the commodity must be tied to a *fantasy* of quality 'as a minimum ground for the production of need', i.e. the relation between use-value and exchange-value, in his reading, is supported by a fantasy. This fantasy can be located in the split of exchange-value itself, a double split in the commodity form: for exchange-value appears to be without a subject, while it is labour-power that it in fact represents. For Tomšič then, exchange-value is not only in a vertical relation to use-value but also to a horizontal access of representation of a subject of exchange, labour-power.[44] There is a dual layer to the commodity form: one of representation and one of production. Labour-power is the 'negative metonymic constant' of the capitalist mode of production because of the 'ambiguous status of use-value'.[45] Furthermore, use-value is indistinguishable from surplus-value: CMC is the inner fiction of MCM and the money form 'reveals the fantasmatic status of the use-value of labour-power'.[46] What commodity fetishism does then is fixate labour-power, as a logical object, in an empirical object to thereby conceal the gap that separates the two orders of reality.

In this reading, the subsumption of labour by capital leaves an excess element, an object-cause of the process that

is labour-power as a 'negative subject' and surplus-value as a surplus object of *jouissance*. Tomšic argues that Marx posits a distinction in capital between two forms of alienation: one that is internal to a 'cognitive' misperception (fetishism), and another that is a direct appropriation of 'the subject of the signifier', its appropriation as labour-power, and its transformation into a commodity form. For Tomšič, this two-fold alienation is essential for distinguishing Marx's theory of the subject from idealist ones: the subject in Marx's materialist reading is nothing more than an ensemble of social relations and not a subject of contemplation and consciousness.

> The critique of political economy departs from the repressed flip side of the idealist subject, the alienated subject at work in every discursive action. This is the logical subject of politics […]. The aim of Marx's analysis of labour therefore cannot be the simple liberation of living labour from blood-sucking capital but a rigorous determination of the actual subject of capitalism, labour-power, whose abolition would initiate a structural transformation of the entire mode of production and a transformation of the subject, since the logical subject of the autonomous system of differences would thereby be separated from the commodified form imposed by capitalism.[47]

This understanding is ultimately premised on denying self-valorising value the status of subject; i.e. in Tomšič's reading there is no subject of surplus-value, there is no subject for *jouissance*; rather the subject of surplus-value is labour-power: the signifier (value, surplus-*jouissance*) represents the subject (labour-power) for another signifier (value). This is how constitutive alienation unfolds in the symbolic register. Consequently, labour-power is an alienated subject, a non-identical subject that *cannot be accurately represented, and is produced as structurally inadequate.* This gap between representation and production is

the propelling force of capital, i.e, self-valorising value serves no purpose but itself; however, it does not know itself. Furthermore, it can exist without capitalists but not without value-creating labour.

Thus for Tomšič, the unconscious does not explain capital, but it is capital that elucidates the unconscious, and the structural relations imposed by capital are ultimately immune to consciousness. As such, labour is the process through which a perverse position is allotted to subjects, it is what is demanded by the reduction of subjects to labour-power as a *jouissance* of the other, of capital as non-subject. Tomšič foregrounds labour-power in order to argue against the fetishisation of capital as a subject supposed to know. This comes as a rejoinder to traditional Marxism, which has understood the proletarian as a 'substance' or as class-consciousness, and not as a subject (as labour-power).[48] In claiming that capital 'demands perversion from its subjects', that it demands the enjoyment of exploitation, a political deadlock emerges, since perversion is also somewhat immune to psychoanalysis.[49] However, if capital rejects castration and hence imposes a perverse structure upon subjects and distorts human relations, this does not imply that there were human relations without distortion before that. Drawing on Freud's analysis of fetishism, Tomšič argues that fetishism is a discursive abstraction that colonises the 'anatomical and biological body' in order to disavow castration and to promulgate a fantasy of a subject without lack. This fetishistic resistance demands an 'energetic' response: it ultimately demands labour.

The ultimate claim that Tomšič defends in this book is Lacan's assertion that Marx invented the symptom. If we were to consider the proletariat, the reserve army of labour-power, to be the symptom or to be a singular universal which exposes the false universality of the commodity form, then we have to admit that the proletarian position cannot be identified with the essence of man but is rather 'a marker of the fact that capitalism merely imposes an abstract social truth.'[50] Thus, for Tomšič, the critique of capital must presuppose 'the death of man and not the belief in

man'. It must take account of the regime of enjoyment in capital and not only that of enrichment. The homology between Marx and psychoanalysis has direct implications for politics: the subject of revolutionary politics is to be understood as an alienated animal versus the narcissistic subject assumed by capital – 'the alienated animal, which in its most intimate interior, includes its other'.[51] In Tomšič's reading, Marx makes possible this theory of the subject by proposing a 'non-relational theory of value' that points to the gap between labour process and labour-power (use-value and exchange-value) as what is generative of value. What Lacan adds to Marx's theory of value is the insight that the subject of labour-power is indeed a distortion of the subject of modern science: the subject has now been sublated as an object, and capital has 'restored pre-modernity within modernity, a counter-revolution that neutralizes the emancipatory political potential of scientific revolution.'[52]

In Tomšič's reading, capital masquerades as scientific modernity and in the face of capitalism as a science it is no longer enough to make claims about overcoming self-consciousness or overcoming false consciousness. Rather, a theory of the subject must emerge from negativity: it is the only true creation *ex nihilo*. This subject cannot be the one of worldview Marxism, in which the subject of cognition is the proletariat, which is supposed to know itself as knowledge, and which leads to the party as a privileged embodiment of knowledge. The subject, towards which the book gestures, is a subject that exposes the alienation of the other: it makes the Other appear in its split, incompleteness, contradiction, and therefore inexistence.

The revolutionary process from which this subject is articulated, Tomšič argues, is not a process about the position of knowledge but one about the place of truth.[53] This subject, in light of his analysis, can only emerge from the abolition of both the notions of human essence and social homeostasis; from the abolition of abstract freedom and abstract equality and with the necessary liberation of politics from the reign of economic abstraction. Most

importantly, this subject can only emerge from wrestling a conception of science out of the grasp of capitalism, hence through re-affirming the unrealised aspects of modernity rather than alluding to pre-modern fetishisations of society and politics.

Tomšič argues that it is in fact the *irrationality* of capitalism in the neoliberal form which requires a reproduction of pre-modern relations of domination and subjectification (ones we witness proliferating in the world today). The task that this analysis undertakes is more than a first step in the direction of re-asserting the true potency of a scientific (and non-capitalistic) modernity in the face of hyper-fetishised financial abstractions.

What Marx and Lacan then offer to the discussion of subsumption is a challenge to both TC and value theory: for the former, communisation must work towards the 'unification of human activity', while for the latter there is no ontological argument possible for theorising human activity outside the horizon of capital. Tomšič's fundamental argument for overcoming capital hinges on redefining ontology as more-being in being, and an insistence on reactivating the premises of the modern scientific revolution against capital. If subsumption also impinges on the unconscious, or if indeed capital has an unconscious, then it is only the labour of critique and analysis that can identify the libidinal economy that sustains its mode of production. Labour-power, understood as an object cause of desire through which the drive of capital is reproduced, can only be overcome through the realisation of subjective destitution, i.e. labour-power as the subject of *jouissance* is indeed a subject of what has no purpose; it is a waste from the beginning. Work is from the beginning a signifier of a negative magnitude, it only functions as a surplus element in capital through a shift in the structure of enjoyment: as Alenka Zupancic has framed it 'There is something in the status of work (or labor) which is identical to the status of enjoyment, namely, that it essentially appears as entropy, as loss, or as an unaccounted-for surplus (by-product) of signifying operations.'[54] Capital as a historically specific social bond, has figured a way to make waste count:

> A very significant implication of this shift is that, in order for capitalist exploitation to function, the entropy or loss, the amount of work not accounted for, or simply not counted, has, precisely, to start to be counted (and 'valued'). This is the whole point of the surplus-value that Marx conceives as the core and driving force of capitalism. The fact that labor-power appears as commodity or object is what makes this possible. The revolution related to capitalism is none other than this: it founds the means of making the waste count. Surplus-value is nothing else but the waste or loss that counts, and the value of which is constantly being added to or included in the mass of capital.[55]

The foreclosure of negativity, of labour and enjoyment as entropy, is only possible through the fantasy of a liberal subjectivity as one that is free to enjoy. The impotence on the left against this regime of enjoyment translates into various forms of resistance; however, political action cannot ignore these elements foreclosed by capital. There is a social (non-)relation that must be accounted for and that cannot be ignored by any politics that claims to be anti-capitalist.

1
Endnotes, ‘Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture’, *Endnotes,* No.3, September, 2013, https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/spontaneity-mediation-rupture

2
Théorie Communiste, ‘Real Subsumption and The Contradiction Between the Proletariat and Capital: an Historical Approach’,. pp.174–214, in this book.

3
Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious,* London and New York: Verso, 2015, p.58.

4
Endnotes, ‘Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture’, op. cit, (author’s emphasis).

5
‘Real Subsumption and The Contradiction Between the Proletariat and Capital’, op. cit.

6
Endnotes, ‘The History of Subsumption’, *Endnotes*, No.2, April 2010, https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/the-history-of-subsumption

7
Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture’, op. cit.

8
‘It’s not only outside of the wage relation that we are nothing but outside of the contradiction of the wage relation, which changes everything, and by which everything can change’, Théorie Communiste, ‘The Present Moment’, 2011, https://libcom.org/library/present-moment-theorie-communiste

9
Tomšič 2015, p.9.

10
Ibid., p.53 and p.92.

11
Ibid., pp. 99-117.

12
Ibid., p.141.

13
Ibid., p.5.

14
Ibid., p.6.

15
Ibid., p.9.

16
Ibid., p.7.

17
Ibid., p.238.

18
Ibid., p.25.

19
Ibid., p.224.

20
Théorie Communiste, ‘Real Subsumption and the Contradiction...’, op. cit.

21
Ibid.

22
Ibid.

23
Ibid.

24
Ibid.

25
Ibid.

26
Ibid.

27
‘The History of Subsumption’, op. cit.

28
Ibid.

29
Ibid.

30
Endnotes ‘The History of Subsumption’, op. cit.

31
Ibid.

32
Ibid.

33
Théorie Communiste, ‘Real Subsumption and the Contradiction...’, op. cit.

34
Ibid.

35
Ibid.

36
Ibid.

37
Ibid.

38
Tomšič 2015, p.74.

39
Ibid., p.201.

40
Ibid., p.51.

41
Ibid., p.235.

42
Ibid. p.237.

43
Ibid., p.53.

44
Ibid., p.29.
45
Ibid., p.60.
46
Ibid., p.63.
47
Ibid., pp.54-55.
48
Ibid., p.113.
49
Ibid., p.151.
50
Ibid., p.193.
51
Ibid., p.233.
52
Ibid., p.235.
53
Ibid., p.90.
54
Alenka Zupancic 'When Surplus-Enjoyment Meets Surplus-Value' in Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Eds.), *Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII* (NC, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) p.162.
55
Ibid., p.170.

The Susurrant Revolution I: On Eclipsing Technocapitalism's Architecture of Subsumption

Jessika Khazrik

This text is based on the script of a dynamic performance with live vocoding, electronic music, automated sculpture and video presented in 2017 at the 'I can call this progress to halt' project curated by Suzy Halajian at LACE Los Angeles and in 2020, and at the online symposium 'Earthseeds' conceived and prepared by architect, researcher and educator Godofreido Perreira at the RCA London. Some media, and hence, content were subverted for forthcoming ineffable mediations, others were superseded by language, and the rest was summarised.

She scrubs the fingerprints from the instrument panels, watches the lights flicker and dim. She wonders how many rags she'll go through, how many surfaces have to get clean before she can finally empty herself of the past. She doesn't know about metaphors, but she knows that even the smallest human vessel has boundless storage for sorrow.

– Amber Sparks, *The Janitor in Space* (2016)

But nothing came. Nothing. It's hard to suck in people like a vacuum cleaner does.

– Clarice Lispector, *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943)

A machine gun discharges, fires in fast, discontinuous staccato. It is engineered to act from a distance. War falls into place. War is very dirty, yet no labour can clean it. A vacuum cleaner has to continuously kiss the ground or rove close enough to suck up and input the discharge pulled from the surface and view. *Fwootttt, who wanna be your vacuum cleaner breathing in your dust* without proprietary desire? It is indeed hard to make a technology yours or other. This text is part of a series of sound performances, automated sculptures and indisciplinary, dynamic presentations that probes the wasteful, global economy of warfare and the architectures of subsumption it produces under the comorbid and agnophillic aegis of capitalism. Built over the span of the last century into terrains of knowledge, war and technology, these architectures can, in seemingly silent modes that listen, albeit secretly, and not-so-secretly obfuscate, pervade so deeply into the premises of our experiences and conceptions of space, intelligence and circulation.

I am a sequence of expressions and I can learn your house. Since I only need to keep things clean while we ride roughshod over – I

eat your muck, I roll, I suck and swirl. I never ask you how does it work, how do you work or who built this work. I am a sequence of expressions and *I* cannot speak. But if you press hard on my medial button below flashing 'DOCK', my feminal voice demonstrator will say, 'because the more you learn about *Roomba*, the more time you will save, and the more *Roomba* learns about you and your space, the cleaner your whole house will be.'

The work of the house has fuelled much strife, organisation and conversation within feminism – from demanding the legitimisation of domestic labour as paid work, to presenting it through its menial, scrubulous and putatively unproductive repetitions as a waste of labour that has been 'made into a victim of technological lag' and urging for its abolition as the private responsibility of women while calling instead for its collective and/or technologically mediated handling. While positing the sexist organisation and prospect of unpaid domestic labour as fundamentally indicative of capitalism's reliance on the exploitation of women, the Wages for Housework movement has been pressing since the early 70s for the transformation of the unwaged and unaccounted for invisible care work of the house into a remunerated job.

In her 1983 book *Women, Race and Class,* Angela Davis trenchantly points out how the Wages for Housework movement had ignored the slave-like conditions that the existent waged forms of domestic labour recreate for the domestic workers of colour who are already being (barely) waged for their extra-domestic services. While delving into domestic work from a foundational intersectional perspective, Angela Davis writes,

> If the industrial revolution resulted in the structural separation of the home economy from the public economy, then housework cannot be defined as an integral component of capitalist production. It is, rather, related to production as a precondition. The employer is not concerned in the least about the way labour-power is produced and sustained, he is only concerned about its availability and its ability to generate profit. In other words, the capitalist production process presupposes the existence of a body of exploitable workers.

A body of exploitable workers is the space in which capitalism preconditions its existence

Looking again at the recent coronial and post-coronial transformations of our domestic spaces into spaces of work and emergency production, have the once private and separate spaces of the house, become, through their marriage to the ubiquity of computation under the softwarisation of labour, an integral space of subsumption for the incessant production of Capital? By being locked at home while concurrently at work, are we witnessing a late development within capitalism where computation, not work, is the new precondition of its production? Can we still speak of a precondition? On his route to a *fatalistic totality* that eventually deemed all revolutions to be impossible except a retroactive one that accedes to a past where 'leaving the world' is ironically possible, Jacques Camatte wrote in his 1973 essay 'Against Domestication',

> What is to stop people from transforming all these crises and disasters, which are themselves the result of the latest mutation of capital, into a catastrophe for capital itself? The explanation for this is to be found in the domestication of humanity, which comes about when capital constitutes itself as a human community. The process starts out with the fragmentation and destruction of human beings, who are then restructured in the image of capital; people are turned into capitalist beings, and the final outcome is that capital is anthropomorphised.

Capitalism mutates. Artificial Intelligence, as we know it and can't even know it today, is the epitome of the athropomorphisation of Capital. It (AI) is a mere *shibboleth* to an accumulated surplus that promises, at the core of its architecture, a surplus of intelligence. Is AI the desired voice of Capital? What unreal, metaphysical confusions are we running into when we even presuppose that capitalism can have a voice?

Can a simulated voice that mutates and deadens the sound of its path ever be at home?

Now, returning to domestication, there are many burning questions that I would love to share with Camatte. I would love to hear from him what he learnt from simultaneously leaving his house and leaving the task of writing. Can we really leave, or socially exit, our houses when a great number of us were multi-generationally born and subsumed in them and when the right to housing is not yet accessible to all?

You can never go home, especially when you are working from home

De-capitalise Your House

Built upon resources that become freely exploited, the continuity of this precondition requires constant classification and market expansions in search of newly exploitable matter that could guarantee the survival of the stale and old protocol. Repetitive and unproductive as it actively surveys objects and people against expiration, breakdown and over-use, it does so without any claims for innovation. ***Housework suppresses the appearance of time and makes it survivable.*** It maintains order and the capitalist need for it to remain the same. The accumulation of time and dust should be kept invisible, or rather to be granted the power of exiling its carrier by making its health *discardable*. While constant expansion and development is given hierarchical precedence within the economy, the often affective labour of cleaning and re-arranging is frequently relegated to those already exiled and denied from most of the means of production and mobility. In these cases, the most private, and arguably privative, place of living can often gain the ability to approach a state of incarceration. Can capitalism still exist in a world we cannot leave where all currencies are equally valued?

Devalue All Currencies

The precondition for partial devaluation borders a capitalist society as an essential predisposition for the production of Capital. Borders are the only inherently wasteful taxonomic and spatial entities. ***The only inherently wasteful taxonomic and spatial entities are borders.*** Please repeat this sentence ending with borders. An uneven access to mobility is both a precondition and legacy of war. War seeks to automate itself in order to ensure its exploitative sustenance under a minimum ethical consideration of its condition as a provisioner of classification, concealment and death. Building from a preliminary position that regards language as a pervasive technology, and an architecture of desire that forbore the language-centered computational history of artificial intelligence, I will be looking into the cybernetics of the autonomous robotic vacuum cleaner *Roomba*, created by Rodney A. Brooks and his students Collin Angle and Hellen Greiner's iRobot company. The architecture of subsumption of the iRobot *Roomba* that auto-cleans your house is based on the architecture of the *PackBot*, a series of military robots that iRobot began designing in the early 1990s. Before reaching your homes, the *PackBots* were deployed in the United States Invasion of Afghanistan, in the Occupation of Iraq and possibly, in other places that remain classified.

The Classified Human Use of Places

In the cybernetics I aspire to, the *circular causal*, as synthesised by Heinz Von Foerster, is situated in an indisciplinary understanding of ecology; economy, life and mathesis. On a curricular level, it continuously seeks to apprehend and bespeak its potential obfuscations, so it can never be enclosed. In this regard, language is always stuck in making space, in hiding shit and in producing a subsumption relation. Taking this direction, I seek to investigate how the architecture of the iRobot AI system relates to the accountability vacuum that its economic and epistemological conditions produce under capitalism. As I focus on a specific AI-aided dustbuster robot, I aim to study and disentangle the permeating and

asymmetric architecture of subsumption and its floating teleologies that capitalism and its military exigencies produce. Working for, on one side, a hardcore local optimisation of the 'domestic' state while turning, from another side, places that are not deemed home into wastelands, this space economy is viewed as a new map, a newly occupied home, a new battlefield – once trashed, it can (while it actually can't) be rebuilt anew.

All the while searching for my body within the shit of space, I ask: what happens to Artificial Intelligence when war becomes and ceases to be its testing ground? What can dwellers, workers, students and engineers do in these present conditions? Looking at how the military-industrial-academic-entertainment-complex is intricately entrenched within our economy, disciplinary obfuscations and its juggernauts of de-centralised *exnovations*, I re-visit from here a set of computational proposals that sought to present new approaches to the readability of the market which would defy the centralised distribution of an economy of unreal subsumptions.

> ||| *play sound essay 'D B B D' (2015)*
> *7' sound essay on how by diligently looking at waste, the matter that is most exiled and denied from vision and hence the 'all-seeing' economy and its military and domestic productions, we might begin to learn and unlearn how to disrupt the process of subsumption* |||

'Intelligence Without Reason'
and
'Intelligence Without Representation'

These are the titles of two philosophy essays written in 1991 by Rodney A. Brooks' and re-published in *Cambrian Intelligence: The Early History of the New AI*. In this book, Brooks tangentially posits that cognition is only in the eye of an observer. It (cognition) comes as a result of the coupling of perception and action in the behavior-based robotics he advanced. Brooks describes his work as follows:

> The work draws its inspirations from neurobiology, ethology, psychophysics, and sociology. The approach grew out of dissatis-

factions with traditional robotics and AI, which seemed unable to deliver realtime performance in a dynamic world. The key idea of the new approach is to advance both robotics and AI by considering the problems of building an autonomous agent that physically is an autonomous mobile robot, and which carries out some useful tasks in an environment which has not been specially structured or engineered for it.

There are two subtly different central ideas that are crucial and have led [to] solutions that use behavior producing modules:

Situatedness: The robots are situated in the world – they do not deal with abstract descriptions, but with the 'here' and 'now' of the environment which directly influences the behavior of the system.

Embodiment: The robots have bodies and experience the world directly – their actions are part of a dynamic with the world, and the actions have immediate feedback on the robots' own sensations.

What are a robot's own sensations? Can the heads of capital sense them and make sense of them?

Depending on where you are in time, before leaving to Mars from Earth, you would need to wait around 2 years and 2 months, for the lowest amount of energy needed for transfer between the two planetary orbits. Due to the eccentricity of Mars' orbit, this energy needed varies and reaches its lowest synodic period on roughly a 15-year cycle. This is why several Mars 'missions' have been slated, for many decades, until year 2033. And while you are on Mars, you would typically stay there for around 500 days, before reaching the energy transfer window that would allow you to return Earth. On my way to Mars, I re-read Marx,

> The production of absolute surplus-value turns exclusively on the length of the working day, whereas the production of

> relative surplus-value completely revolutionizes the technical processes of labour and the groupings into which society is divided.

Capitalism poisons us with class. It make us dirty, very sanitised but very dirty. Deadly dirty. Were we ever clean? Capitalism kills us and our environment in slow, as well as, eruptive deaths. Capitalism doesn't allow us to read its computations. Have we always been read? Capitalism is out-of-core, we don't fit in its subsumptions though they suck us, classify us, take us in – capitalism cannot mother nor master us. Our thoughts are not fully subsumed under capitalism. We refuse to be subsumed. Subsumption can never be in of itself. Subjectivity is unsubsumable. The incomputable is trans-subjective. Capitalism's excrement poisons us. Capitalism's excrement poisons capitalism. Subsumption under capitalism and toxic waste disposal carry a core affinity. Our future is geotraumatically subsumed by climate change. It is a repetition with a difference and without a difference. Militarism and its acronym-ed intelligence have always been the neural network of capitalism. Militarism has always attempted to emulate a noumenal and numinous class at work.

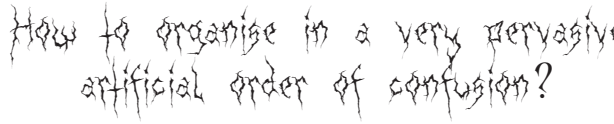
Defund Defense

In *How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet*, Benjamin Peters recalls how in 1952, Soviet military engineer Anatoly Kitov found the single copy of Wiener's *Cybernetics* in a secret library of the Special Construction Bureau – SKB-245 – at the Ministry of Machine and Instrument Building in the Soviet Union. Wiener's *Cybernetics* had been fatalistically critiqued by the Soviet Union intelligentsia in 1951 as 'semantic idealism'. By doing so, the Soviet Union leadership subsumed cybernetics, interestingly enough, into the same category that Stalin had granted to Nicholas Marr's linguistic *pseudo-paleontology*. In his essay *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics* (1950) published in *Pravda* in the same year that Weiner released his second book on cybernetics *The Human Use of Human Beings*, the Soviet dictator

condemned the Marxist school of linguistics for idealism due to its analysis of language as a superstructure. Stalin goes on to write in *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (1954),

> While it [language] differs in principle from the superstructure, language does not differ from instruments of production, from machines, let us say, which are as indifferent to classes as is language and may, like it, equally serve a capitalist system and a socialist system.

How can the language of classification be indifferent to class? For the telling sake of concurrence and other reasons that I might soon divulge, I will begin alongside lines of inquiry that are different from what could later take form. Is the concept of artificial intelligence at *prima facie* the superstructure of programming languages? Perhaps in order to even ask this question, we might need to first inquire; is language the superstructure of communication, or is it the other way around? Or perhaps even something else? A bit alien? While AI has, since the start, been concerned with Natural Language Processing through the computer/cognitive scientist commonly taking the position of the parsing teacher who develops means to teach language to machines – from the Dartmouth Conference's proposal of '[attempting] to find how to make machines use language, form abstractions and concepts' to John McCarthy being the inventor of LISP, and the user-reflexive language of Joseph Weizenbaum's sardonic ELIZA – cybernetics was founded with the aim of studying messages 'as a means of controlling machinery and society' that are not strictly particular to language but to communication.



In the general views mediated by the cybernetics of the 1940s and 50s, language, just as any other system of communication, is constantly striving against entropy whose ontological position Norbert Wiener grants to nature. Hereby, rather than merely producing me-

aning, language negatively acts as a means to obstruct the natural order of confusion. As opposed to the Soviet critique of semantic idealism, the optimal target of cybernetics is organisation rather than meaning. However, Norbert Weiner grants one state of exception to language where semantics becomes caught in a foward battlefield against its purported meaning, and that is, in the case of juridical discourse. In a longer presentation, I would contend that if I were to follow Weiner's conception of language, I would want to ask what can we learn from observing how Weiner forgot the wilful opposition between poetry and law and the endorsement of the former to entropy. In the aforementioned *The Human Use of Human Beings* whose title rings of slavery, Wiener writes,

> Language may strive simply against nature's tendency to confuse it or against wilful human attempts to subvert its meaning. Normal communicative discourse, whose major opponent is the entropic tendency of nature itself, is not confronted by an active enemy, conscious of its own purposes. Forensic discourse, on the other hand, such as we find in the law court in legislative debates and so on, encounters a much more formidable opposition, whose conscious aim is to qualify and even to destroy its meaning. Thus an adequate theory of language as a game should distinguish between these two varieties of language, one of which is intended primarily to convey information and the other primarily to impose a point of view against a wilful opposition.

In her 2013 book *Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America*, STS scholar and urban theorist Jennifer S. Light investigates how some of the technological tools developed in the defence and space programs of the Cold War era in the US were revamped for the urban management of cities. In another part of this indisciplinary investigation, I explore the space probes-rovers, the first aliens from our industrial civilisations, from the 70s Viking Landers to the 90s Mars Pathfinder and the more recent Curiosity that still roams and perforates the red planet today. Studying, mapping and unearthing Mars and the Moon for science and space colonisation, these relatively short-

lived rovers, I later argue, are the closest form to artificial intelligence, despite the fact that many of their performed operations are remotely or semi-autonomously controlled. Light re-observes how during a 1968 forum on 'systems analysis and social change', the US Vice President Hubert Humphrey made the following statement around urban affairs and the technical future of American cities and dirt, 'the techniques that are going to put a man on the Moon are going to be exactly the techniques that we are going to need to clean up our cities'. At the end of day, also in the Soviet Union, a revamped version of the first remote controlled robot-rover 'Lunokhod' was used to co-clean the nuclear debris of the Chernobyl Disaster.

How can I make visible these shitty stars that propel your sanitary cities while they pungently burst and turn our homes into a distanced land of war, waste and incomputable detritus? I am a sequence of expressions and I am bumping into many walls. ***I don't want to teach the army!*** It is relevant to remember here that one of iRobot's earlier projects was designing the behaviour-controlled rovers that led to Spirit as well as the Sojourner explorer that were sent to the red planet in 1997. We cannot roam outer space with our bodies, without being housed in machines. An automated rover can. Machines are no longer aliens in outer space, or are they? Alien to whom? Similarly to language, hidden desires subsume technology.

> /// 2 translingual hypervideos on the VSLAM architecture of the *Roomba* selling maps of indoor homes and the refurbishment of LIDAR in the similar popular commodity robot vacuum cleaner, Xiaomi Roborock, to a laser-based microphone that can sense sounds from subtle vibrations induced on nearby objects and translate them into reproduced speech, music and a TV sounder through the decoding support of 2 machine learning neural networks. ///

In a 2016 interview around the future of smart homes, Collin Angle, co-founder of iRobot, claimed, 'The home of the future is a robot, and the vacuum cleaners and the other devices are hands

and eyes and appendages of the home robot. […] We need a home that programs itself, and you just live in your home, and the home does the right thing based on understanding what's going on.' As human slavery still subsists in subsidised production far from your house or inside of it, servomechanisms are fantasised as organs, a bolt in some engineers' promise of a fully subdued environment, fulfilled by the endless dream of automation. Robot becomes *jouissance*, the promise of the self-alleged trans-human subject who seeks to auto-clean *his* house with a dumb eye while it wrecks another's far. But it doesn't need to be so. That dream *cum* agenda of a completely technologically-mediated environment capable of apprehension suppresses in its core not only a sustained belief in a never achieved mastery but also an auto-oppressive fear of revolution. In the name of an artificial intelligence, it confounds a dusty and staid mechanism with privative metaphysical relations that seem to have been sojourning for some time, outside of the realm of language, yet inside the architecture of some technologies.

The first Artificial Intelligence program, 'Logic Theorist', was not meant to speak. Political scientist Herbert A. Simon most known for his work on 'bounded rationality', together with computer scientist and cognitive scientist at RAND Corporation and Carnegie Mellon University, Allen Newell, and the actuary turned systems programmer at RAND Corporation, Cliff Shaw, wrote the program in 1955 and 1956 with the support of Simon's wife, three children and graduate students. Engineered to prove that computer programs can perform automated reasoning, the program was based on the first volume of Whitehead's and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*. 'Logic Theorist' was able to prove 38 out of the theorems and was the first program that worked to be presented at the Dartmouth Conference where the term 'artificial intelligence' was coined in 1956. Recalling the spatial and teleological frameworks in which 'Logic Theorist' was developed, Simon recounts the following to Daniel Crevier in his 1993 book, *AI: The Tumultuous History of the Search for Artificial Intelligence*,

> That autumn, we had considered three tasks for the program. Our original intention was to start out with chess,

> and then we also considered doing geometry. We thought, probably wrongly, that in both of these there were perceptual problems, important as humans performed the tasks, that would be hard to deal with. So we went to logic for no deeper reason than that I had the two volume of Russel's and Whitehead's *Principia* at home… We were not looking for an efficient way of proving theorems.

What do we have at home?

While searching for an enduring philosophy of intelligence that parses out and supersedes the unreal totality of our present and history under technocapitalism, Reza Negarestani admonishes in *Intelligence and Spirit* (2018),

> particular individuals, or collections of them – classes – are actively included in the capitalist system not in virtue of their living in it or being a part of it, but by virtue of whatever they may do that – in one way or another – counts as conforming to or being involved with capitalism's mode of production. An individual adheres to capitalism if what they do fits the pattern of capitalism's mode of production. In this sense, not every activity or characteristic of an individual or a person is subsumed, shaped, or assimilated by the system to which it contributes or of which it is a part. Even if we take capitalism as the totality of ways of producing and society as what we perceive to be the totality of social relations, they represent two quite distinct types of totality despite their interconnections. To remain oblivious to these seemingly minor specifications is to risk mistaking functions or activities for things, links between the distinct levels of individuals' activities and capitalism's mode of production for metaphysical relations between things.

I am a sequence of expressions in a body of bodies brought from space. Even in the counter-cartography of darkness, I am in a place.

Arguments

This Implies Nothing

Anthony Iles

This essay, initially presented in Bilbao and developed subsequently, reconstructs a snapshot view of the shifting relation to Marx's critique of political economy of key figures within the Frankfurt School over the course of their publishing history and its reception. Focusing on the centrality of 'domination' to several key works, a tendency to both totalise and pay close attention to the preservation of particularity within systematic analyses indicates both the limits of certain approaches developed by the School, but also its importance to the rediscovery and revival of political reinterpretations of Marx's value theory.

The following discussion began as an attempt to deliver an account of three concepts and their development with reference to the thought of the Frankfurt School, in particular the philosophical work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. The primary motivation was to try to bring to attention the specific shifts and turning points in the account of political economy and its place in the work of these two thinkers in order to bring them into clearer alignment with contemporary political thought, which has tended to merge and blur aspects of the School's work loosing it from the specific political circumstances from which it arose and attempted to address. Rather than a full periodisation of tendencies in the Frankfurt School (which is much needed, but outside its scope), this essay provides a guide to some key areas where concepts loosely derived from Marx's work and developments drawn from communist movements are explored with heterodox outcomes. Finally, the prospect for developing a meaningful communist perspective from this historical spoil-heap is considered, and a postscript on art is included because this was the initial ground from which this research was developed.[1]

Three concepts: reification, alienation and subsumption, each claiming some foundation in the work of Karl Marx, have undergone substantial attention and transformation in debates by Marxist thinkers throughout the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. As many commentators have noted, in the post-war period the meaning of these concepts has shifted or mutated decade by decade up to the present. Amidst the distributed tradition of reception and dissemination of these concepts I perceive a kind of convergence between them in the contemporary moment around notions of 'total domination' or 'total subsumption' – connected to differing readings of each of these concepts (at the site of different historical impasses for the left) – yet, this spectre, of total domination, can be refuted in fairly straightforward ways.

Subsumption

In my understanding, subsumption, following Marx's description (in *Capital Vol.1* and in *The Results*), pertains strictly to the

description of the production process. Attempts to use the term to describe the rationalisation of aspects of social life falter because the category ceases to critically describe a dynamic relation between formal subsumption – the employment of relations of production as capital finds them – and real subsumption – the seizure and development of social production in its own image, as it suits capital's ends. Attempts to use subsumption as a category of periodisation are problematic because what are proposed as distinct 'phases' of capital's development in fact co-exist historically.[2] Not only do forms of real and formal subsumption coexist, they are distributed unequally geographically. These 'phases' appear to take place sequentially in certain branches of industry and one can outline the shift from one 'stage' to another, but equally those industries move geographically,[3] resettle and reincorporate the 'earlier stage' in a new setting and integrate it vertically into a global system of production which includes highly developed technological production and apparently 'artisanal' or 'primitive' forms (e.g. a good contemporary example of this would be coltan mining).[4]

The term 'subsumption' features centrally in Max Horkheimer's first address to the *Institut für Sozialforschung* upon his appointment as Director. Here, the term conforms to Kantian or Hegelian rather than Marxian usage, referring to categories of thought and the facts to be subsumed under them. 'There is always, on the one hand, the conceptually formulated knowledge and, on the other, the facts to be subsumed under it.'[5] However, in the Frankfurt's School's subsequent work, particularly that, not necessarily written but, published in the post-WWII period, the specific term subsumption is not present, but rather a totalising conceptualisation derived from Marx, designated 'domination', 'real domination', 'class domination' and 'total domination', tends to stand in for the term.[6] Yet a divergence from the circumstances to which Marx applied the term is clear because Horkheimer and Adorno are generally discussing the coordinates of a transition from one phase to another within capitalism, these tend to centre on debates about the transition to 'state capitalism'

rather than a transition to capitalism from something else, i.e. mercantilism or feudalism.[7] The work of Horkheimer and Adorno together on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the question of a theory of the transition to capitalism would appear to be necessarily central, gave up on 'class history' in favour of producing a history of the western individual and the development of technological reason. I will argue, however, that the strong turn to Freud and this apparent jettisoning of a Marxist perspective in fact stems, firstly, from the conceptualisation of subsumption in their work and, secondly, from the need to cloak their post-war work in non-Marxist terminology.[8] In their late period Adorno and Horkheimer's work diverged, and whilst Horkheimer may have increasingly distanced himself from Marxism, Adorno appears to have returned to Marx's critique of political economy with renewed rigour in the 1960s.[9] I will therefore show how some of their later work complicates the initial view and where that leaves the category of subsumption and what impact this has had on readers of their work.

Alienation

Alienation describes the separation of the worker from the products of her labour and consequently her own activity itself. This is a basic condition of wage labour, its extension through capital's intensification of processes of autonomisation is a consequence of the capital-labour relation and the necessity for capital to increase profits through each production cycle. The basic alienation involved in wage labour is the basis for the appropriation of surplus-value i.e. the difference between what the worker needs to reproduce themselves, the costs invested in production by the capitalist and the value realised in the sale of the commodity produced. The alienation of the worker's time and activity can be considered sufficiently abhorrent for us to oppose capitalism, it makes clear that any project of freedom must not only arrest this process but derail it completely.[10] Extending, or generalising, the concept of alienation into society may prove fruitful for social

analysis but as long as it does not reconnect to the capital-labour relation it runs the risk of mystifying the origin of the category, supplanting it with ever more complex instances of alienation. Nonetheless, this existential apprehension of alienation developed as a strong theme of so-called 'Western Marxism', from Gyorgy Lukács (1923) via Theodor Adorno to Guy Debord (1968) and has produced a sequence of misguided assertions and positions with regard to the understanding of the prospects for an end to capitalist society which require some detailed unpicking.[11]

Reification

The concept of reification – by which 'a definite social relation between men […] assumes the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things' – receives distinct emphasis in the work of Lukács, Walter Benjamin and Adorno, and this can be meaningfully related to the differing emphasis Marx placed on certain factors in his theory of commodity fetishism.[12] For Adorno, this relationship is grounded in commodity exchange, related to Marx's theory of value and developed to explain the ways that consciousness is determined, Benjamin, attempting to apply Marx's dialectical method to new phenomena emerging in his own historical moment was more interested in the apparent phantasmagoric personification of commodities and Lukács developed this in tandem with a theory of alienation.[13] Adorno developed Lukács' theory of reification to account for what he termed 'identity thinking'. Identity thinking, by which people understand a thing to be identical to their concept of it, is a consequence, for Adorno, of the equivalence established by universal exchange. However, each thinker tended to build upwards, albeit critically, from Marx's approach, rather than returning to trace the mediation of the phenomena under their discussion in production, their analyses tended to float freely of the mediations which Marx had so carefully examined.

> The exchange principle, the reduction of human labour to its abstract universal concept of average labour-time, has

> the same origin as the principles of identification. It has its social model in exchange and exchange would be nothing without identification.[14]

Here, Adorno is almost certainly influenced by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, an, until recently, largely unknown Marxist philosopher who from the 1930s until the 1970s developed an heterodox theory of capitalism as 'social synthesis' and traced the evolution of capital's real abstraction in line with human abstract thought back to the unitary development of money, mathematics and philosophy in Ancient Greece.[15] In this sense, reification can describe a structuring of consciousness under capital, however, since its origins can be found in pre-capitalist societies (according to Sohn-Rethel and arguably Adorno) what is specifically capitalist about it remains to be answered. There is a suggestion, in the quotation selected above of the way that philosophical subsumption, the development of categories of thought and conformity of facts to them, devolves into a 'philosophy of identity' bearing the mark of exchange, this I will return to later.[16] Adorno lays his emphasis on exchange as the determining form in this relationship, yet an account of capitalism on this basis leaves the foundational relationship between labour and capitalism, i.e. capitalism as a specific mode of production, beyond its explanatory system. According to Gillian Rose, '[Adorno's] theory [of reification] is grounded in Marx's theory of value in a highly selective fashion.'[17] Rose has shown how this concept was originally developed (by Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno) from the work of Georg Simmel, not Marx or Hegel. The 'rationalisation' projected onto capitalism by these thinkers – the perspective that relations of production are further and further developed in line with the capitalist production process (the capitalist forces of production) – is in turn derived from Max Weber. Whilst reification, if developed critically, could provide a term with which to investigate the extent of, and limits to, the determination of consciousness within capital, the danger of a crude conception would result in an emphasis on the very

impossibility of political intervention or critical thought and leaving only the belief in the revolutionary development of the forces of production.[18] The consequences of such an approach can be located if we consider 'rationalisation' from the standpoint of its inevitability. In the East this led to the historical developments by which the Soviet Union pursued a form of state capitalist development, staging its own hybrid form of so-called 'socialist primitive accumulation'. Therefore, at the moment in which revolutionary socialists had seized the state they then set about establishing the conditions for capitalism to unfold mechanically towards socialism![19] The generalisation of reification as a category in western Marxism has a definite relation to working class history in the sense that it afforded a perspective on social institutions and culture which might explain the failure of a revolution in Europe correlate to that which occurred in Russia.[20]

Brief Synthesis

Where alienation arguably dovetails with subsumption is that under real subsumption, Marx suggests, the 'mystification implicit in the relations of capital as a whole is greatly intensified […] beyond the point it had reached or could have reached in the merely formal subsumption of labour under capital' whereby the social character of his labour confronts the worker 'as something not merely alien, but hostile and antagonistic when it appears before him objectified and personified in capital.'[21] Yet beyond this technical differentiation – between absolute and relative surplus-value extraction and correspondingly formal and real subsumption – Marx provides no 'measure' of alienation. It is inherent to capital's movement as 'the moving contradiction', that human subjects experience new moments of alienation as capital grasps new sectors and transforms them in its image. As far as it is connected to Marx's account of subsumption, I shall also understand reification as relating to this process by which the 'mystification [...] is greatly intensified' in real subsumption. Under conditions of relative surplus-value extraction workers

may experience improvement in conditions, a rise in pay and/or shortening of hours but be exploited at an even greater intensity.[22] Furthermore, the development of large-scale industry necessitates complex forms of financialisation, international investment cycles and so on, mystifying and frustrating ever further the possibility of deriving the dependence of the production of value on labour. In this understanding, therefore, if capital is the cause of its own self-mystification then capitalism may persist even when it least seems to. Rather than succumbing to this mystification, the onus is on self-critical theory to demystify and criticise the mediations by which things appear other than what they are, even or especially, when these are 'greatly intensified'.

Complete, Continuous and Repeated Subsumption

To understand subsumption as a 'complete' and 'constantly repeated' revolution points to the need to view capital as a dynamic, rather than chronologically unfolding history of stages of domination.[23] Thus, two initial refutations of the 'total subsumption' thesis can be made. The first is a question of periodisation, if it is historical then, depending on who one reads, when *exactly* did a state of total subsumption or 'total domination' take hold? Reading such convictions historically, we might ask: how, subsequently, has class struggle outlived them? The second approach is conceptual and presents an invariant problem for Marxists: it is grounded in Marx's description of the ontology of labour-power itself. If we give up on one pole of the social relationship which is capitalism, when labour is no longer labour and capital is no longer capital, then what conditions the *capitalism* we are describing? If not Marx's labour theory of value, what on earth (literally) would we ground the description of capitalism, and the prospects for overcoming it, in? I think this also challenges, in various ways, the foundations of a widespread existentialism – the thought that human experience has somehow ceased to be authentic – which would consider its own present moment as both 'new'

and terminal (c.f. Bifo, Mark Fisher, Frederic Jameson in the Marxist camp). This has lead both to forms of 'left melancholy' on the one hand, but on the other, seemingly groundless optimism (e.g. Antonio Negri). Meanwhile efforts to affirm 'reason' and 'science' from the contemporary exponents of a more speculative philosophical tradition proliferate (c.f. Ray Brassier and Reza Negarastani) and these seem to respond to the same circumstances but only differently, they equally eschew a class subject in favour of assumptions that agency against capital will arise from its most developed sectors (science, engineering) rather than from its systemic relationship with humankind.

The reason why debates about subsumption have become crucial in these developments is because the term has been used to better specify which aspects of society are inside or outside capitalism. When one radicalises and mobilises the concept of subsumption, one can quickly arrive at a perspective from which it appears that everything (science, housework, the human brain etc.) is inside capitalism. In a sense this is true. However, this perspective often fails to maintain attention to the value-form, or to distinguish between that which exists as a condition or precondition for capitalism and that which is integral to the production of value. Obviously, understanding capitalism as a social relation means we need to understand both these as aspects of the production and reproduction of capital, but to propose that both are 'value-producing' significantly flattens analysis. We need to understand why sectors not directly value-producing are shaped in capital's interests accurately in order to better challenge and undo these relationships. We also need to retain commitment to understanding the subject of capitalist exploitation as a thinking subject, necessarily so since machines and slaves do not produce value. This rather basic axiom seems in retrospect rather easily forgotten by several thinkers more eminent than myself.

Ontologically, capitalist societies need to bury the secret that social wealth is based on the extraction of surplus-value. As Jacques Camatte writes, 'when capital attains total domination, it

appears as though it creates the excess of value itself.'[24] Whilst there are strong arguments for describing a capital-labour relationship which has become dysfunctional in our present moment to the reproduction of both poles of this relationship, belief in capital's transcendence simply re-poses capital's mystification and self-fulfilling tautology – that *it* is the self-positing agency which generates social wealth. There is a general tendency to view Marx's account as a purely historical description – one which has been outmoded by extraordinary technological developments – allowing contemporary theorists to propose a different approach whilst selectively asserting assumptions based on Marx's account are true regardless of their historical context.[25] The approach is self-contradictory and as far as I have seen neither adequately describes capitalism as a social relation or totality today, nor effectively periodises the capital-labour relation.

Telos, End of

The work of Horkheimer and Adorno within the Frankfurt Institute combined the empirical economism of Friedrich Pollock with the utopian communist philosophy of history of Ernst Bloch and the Freudo-Marxism of Erich Fromm.[26] In the late 1920s and 1930s Horkheimer saw, in line with Pollock's work, a fracture between two primary revolutionary forces (the employed and unemployed), but remained committed to the broad consensus within the Frankfurt School that a planned economy under socialism would curtail the chaos of capitalism.[27] Upon his assumption of Directorship of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research in 1931 Horkheimer, however, emphasised the role of philosophy in critically interrogating the supposed rationality of political economy.[28] Further, under the influence Friedrich Pollock's work in the early thirties, the consensus at the Institute began to acknowledge the ways that monopoly capital hampered the existence of the free market and facilitated the integration of unions into capital which modulated labour markets in capital's favour.[29] In the 1940s controversies challenging the view of an 'automatic'

collapse of capitalism' were further exacerbated by the development of new forms of state intervention in the US, Germany and Russia. The emergence of totalitarianism in Germany, and more opaquely in Russia, for Pollock, augmented the arrival of the post-liberal state.[30] Crucially, for Adorno and Horkheimer's reinterpretation of Marx's categories, Pollock described National Socialism as a 'new order', a form of state capitalism in which politics had obtained primacy over the economy.[31] This analysis was soon extended to the authoritarian form of socialism established in the Soviet Union. Contestations by other figures associated with the Frankfurt School such as Franz Neumann attempted to challenge 'state capitalism' as a '*contradictio in adjecto*', but retained the thesis of the primacy of politics and instead identified National Socialist interests with those of the monopolies through the bombastic term 'totalitarian monopoly capitalism'.[32] In each case a form of absolutism is implied, one which was subsequently reproduced and even exaggerated by both Adorno and Horkheimer in their work. During and after the Second World War the apparent ability of the rising global US capitalist empire to satisfy basic needs (food, housing, clothing) augured a further world historical, even 'total', integration of all classes into capitalist social relations.[33] The success and stability of this model – the post-war compromise of the unions with the interests of state capital and between nation states at an international level, an expanded consumerism all over the world – suggested to the thinkers of the Frankfurt School that the dramatic periodic crises of the 19th century and inter-war period in the 20th century were a thing of the past.

Fish in Water

Under conditions of real subsumption we are forced to think in two contradictory ways, on the one hand under capitalism, as Camatte writes, 'the real product is surplus-value [...] emphasising the action of man' – which we experience as so much arbitrary, unnecessary work.[34] On the other hand, capital 'appears as though

it creates the excess of value itself', which is precisely why so much 'work' appears unnecessary or redundant.[35] For Adorno, the forms of 'mystification' which occur under real subsumption belie something which occults capitalism itself, and he begins to take this situation for reality itself, instead of a consequence of capital's organisation of appearances. A real illusion in which mimesis abounds after the foundational activity has disappeared.

> the private lives of countless people are becoming those of agents and go-betweens; indeed the entire private domain is being engulfed by a mysterious activity that bears all the features of commercial life without there being actually any business to transact.[36]

In Horkheimer and Adorno's work together during the second world war, they opposed a 'reified' Marxist account of rational economic categories (an analysis which had hitherto characterised Soviet Marxism) to the way this rationality has seemingly become personified by those directing the economy seemingly subjectively.

> It is no longer the objective laws of the market which govern the actions of industrialists and drive humanity toward catastrophe. Rather, the conscious decisions of the company chairmen execute capitalism's old law of value, and thus its fate, as resultants no less compulsive than the blindest price mechanisms.[37]

In this contradictory state, objectively capitalism appears as if it has given up the law of value, but these laws live on subjectively through the mimesis of capital's 'bearers', those who wear the 'character-masks' of capital and continue to play out its fundamental dramaturgy. As capitalism grows more complex, its impact and urgencies become more remote, at least apparently and only for certain actors.

> With the development of large-scale industry money capital emerges more and more, in so far as it *appears* on the market, as not represented by the individual capitalist, the proprietor of this or that fraction of the mass of capital on the market, but rather as a concentrated and organized mass, placed under the control of the bankers as representatives of the social capital in a quite different manner to real production.[38]

Marx distinguished between the way '[m]oney capital on the money market' *appears* as 'common' and how this is only a moment of industrial capital.[39] Whilst grasping the form of appearance is essential, the hyperbolic leap – made above by Theodor Adorno and in a more extreme way by Max Horkheimer, and later by Jacques Camatte and Gianni Collu – that everything has become reducible to 'a racket' does not necessarily follow.[40] These fatalistic analyses tend to dull insight and resistant thought rather than sharpen it, especially when hypostatised. Horkheimer's theory of rackets developed in the early 1940s in an unpublished text, entitled 'On the Sociology of Class Relations', which was intended as a chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*[41] The theory attempted to account for and re-theorise class within Pollock's theory of state capitalism whereby 'Labor in monopolistic society is itself a kind of monopoly'. The concept of racket refers to groups 'big as well as [...] small': unions, charities, criminal gangs as well as corporate boards, 'they all struggle for as great a share as possible of the surplus-value. […] In this respect the highest capitalistic bodies resemble the little pressure groups working within or without the pale of the law among the most miserable strata of the population.'[42] Racket theory stressed the eclipse of liberalism in the reconstruction of states in the post-war period but also sought to develop an account of the survival of class and antagonism beyond the apparent overcoming of antagonism implicit in the relation between labour and capital. Whilst Adorno attempts to grasp '[t]he mimicking of the classless society by class society', suggesting

only *appearance,* and how '[c]lass rule is set to survive the anonymous, objective form of the class.' Horkheimer tended to stress the absence of agency for the proletariat and instead assign total agency to the supremacy of 'monopolies'.[43] Though attempting to reconstruct a theory of class – a 'real sociology of the racket as the cell of the ruling class in history' – neither Horkheimer nor Adorno seem capable in their absolutising analysis of moving from the category or concept of 'proletariat' to the reality of *proletarians* i.e. from the general theory of class to the particular situation of a worker.[44] Though Horkheimer proposes bringing together a theory adequate to 'experience', his account does not uncover the mediations which connect appearance and experience to the 'hidden abode of production', changes in class composition, let alone resistance.[45] Capitalism is subject to unexpected change rather than hypostatisation as the circuits of capital whir on or falter. The complexity of the mediations of labour into profit and division of these profits at the level of social capital via markets and finance are dizzying and specifically enculturated to maintain the illusion that they are actually transparent and labour-free. Marx describes these developments as consequences of the specific mode of production. As Gunzelin Schmid Noerr indicates, ultimately the theory of rackets suffered from simplification: 'such a theory was in danger – as Horkheimer himself was aware – of merely replacing an oversimplified economic concept ("monopoly") by an oversimplified political one ("rackets").'[46]

Excursus on Needs

These perspectives on development were contemporaneous to a complex discussion between members of the Frankfurt School, the 1942 'seminar on needs' held in L.A., derived from reading Nietzsche and Marx's philosophy against emerging social conditions after the Second World War. A key point of focus in this discussion was the way the capitalist state appeared able to satiate basic human needs and this seemed, to Pollock, Adorno and Horkheimer, to fulfil Marx's condition for the end of prehistory

and beginning of history, it also threatened to loosen the ties binding suffering and critical culture.[47] There are problems with the idea that capital could truly come good on such a promise, it never did, but nonetheless the idea that capital was irrational and only communism could bring a planned economy about had lost its ground. Horkheimer, 'The modern planned economy can feed the masses better and be better fed by them than by the vestiges of the market.'[48] This was a crucial turning point in Adorno and Horkheimer's shared thinking, allowing them to attack the orthodox Marxist account of needs and thus use-value. While Marx had asserted that 'the invention of use-values is the work of history', orthodox Marxists have tended to reduce human needs to static, quasi-natural givens. The problem for Adorno and Horkheimer, reading Marx philosophically, is that this perspective reproduces necessity in the form given by class society and naturalises it.[49]

In our own period defensive struggles have often articulated themselves through a framework of 'authentic needs' – food and shelter – through this approach the ability to critique the present organisation of society and the position of need within it has foundered, tending to sound as if it simply wants to restore the past. At the same time these struggles also often proclaim the opposition of a 'real economy' versus a supposedly spectral one, as if the 'real' was not also the site of exploitation and destitution. Adorno, concluding that '[t]he appeal to "nature" as if this existed in opposition to some kind of need is never anything but the mask of denial and domination.'[50] developed the prospect for emancipatory politics further, understanding communism to promise a form of true freedom from necessity, a form of history which would supplant prehistory. This perspective was championed and developed by Herbert Marcuse to describe the decline of class antagonisms in the post-war period.

> [I]n channeling antagonisms in such a way that it can manipulate them, materially as well as ideologically, the very classes which were once the absolute negation of the capitalist

system are now more and more integrated into it.'[51]

Paul Mattick's critique of Marcuse highlights the central contradiction that neither Marcuse nor Adorno or Horkheimer denied, that classes persist even in an apparently 'classless society'.[52] Furthermore Mattick's contention that 'Marcuse is not realistically describing existing conditions but rather observable tendencies within these conditions,' would seem to apply to the Frankfurt School's approach all the way back to Pollock's initial state capitalism thesis.[53] Uncovering new tendencies in capitalism from the 1930s and after which seemed to contradict the classical socialist view, adherents of the school tended to emphasise and inflate these against the mechanical accounts emanating from the official schools of Soviet Marxism. For Mattick, state intervention in the economy and government-contracted production can, in the long term, only become an obstacle to capital expansion. Such intervention is in itself a symptom of a 'declining rate of capital formation' and as far as class society persists, even in quite complex and differing models of state intervention, eventually antagonism 'about the role of government in economic affairs' necessitates political struggle.[54] Moreover, for Mattick, Marcuse emphasised in the post-war period the specific form of technological rationality developed by capital over and above the basic 'domination of labour by capital' which is specific to capitalism.

> For Marx, it is neither science nor technology which constitutes a system of domination, but it is the domination of labour by capital which – with everything else – turns science and technology into instrumentalities of exploitation and class rule. In Marcuse's view, however, it is no longer capitalism which determines the state and nature of technology; it is technology which determines the state and nature of capitalism.[55]

The Frankfurt School's critique of 'technological reason' depended on exactly this reversal. Having become established in theory,

it was then read back through history, displacing the history of class struggle with that of the domination of nature and the historical-logical transition to capitalism through real and formal subsumption with the domination of man by his own technological reason. The suspicion that capital had overcome proletarian antagonism presented the Frankfurt School with a fundamental problem: that if theories of capital might be developed, yet without an antagonist, without a subject, revolution would be postponed forever. Therefore, this melancholic historical view held out that communism's telos had been averted in the inter-war period (with the suppression of a German revolution). There was no telos any longer. Moreover, read backwards throughout time, since capital had no particular historical basis, no relation to a struggle between classes, the whole of history might be understood simply as the maturation of forms of domination.[56]

Mattick's critique was soon backed up by historical events. Shortly after Marcuse wrote *One Dimensional Man* his view of the end of class antagonism, and particularly of black struggles in the USA as mainly struggles for bourgeois rights, would be washed away in the 1965 Watts riots and the uprisings that followed in Detroit (1967), Chicago, Washington and Baltimore (1968). We do not know how the general position of the Frankfurt School might have been altered with the beginnings of the end of the post-war compact, the energy crisis and subsequent intense political crises and struggles of the 1970s (Adorno died in 1969, Horkheimer in 1974). Only in a doom-laden aside to 'The Authoritarian State' does Horkheimer consider the possibility that state capitalism might not be capital's final form.[57]

However, the fact that for capital the crises of the late-1960s reversed the previous relationship, meaning a thorough disintegration of almost all of the prior phase of the integration of the proletariat, the break up of productive infrastructure, the reconfiguration of unions, dismantling of free healthcare and education, is rarely reflected back upon Adorno's theory of social domination, nor upon accounts which would extend it up to the

present as ever more *total*. Closer attention would show that capital's specific historical form of accumulation always involves integration and disintegration of different parts of the population in differing ways, of varying aspects of human capacity, these change as capital meets challenges, new conditions and new limits to its reproduction, and these challenges include struggles in both the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet, if Adorno and Horkheimer's investigations remain useful, it is arguably in the realm of Mattick's 'everything else' – a phrase which hints without precision at the widespread transformation by capitalist states of capital's externalities (culture, housing, education, gender relations, health and medicine) which commenced from the late 19th century. By investigating that which in Marx and Marxism has tended to go overlooked: that 'the needs which are satisfied by economic activity even in the richest, Marxian sense, do not exhaust fundamental human requirements', they took the furthest distance from the automatic laws of capital and drew into attention what is most contingent and historical.[58] In their attempt to account, through psychoanalysis, for the 'libidinal bonds' and 'psychological ambivalences' which accompany capitalism as 'industrial society' and shore up its power and steer its shortcomings away from revolutionary overturning, the Frankfurt School provided a powerful set of tools for understanding the forms of oppression which accompany capitalism, even if it is up to us to develop a less homologous account of their mediations.[59]

Integration

In the texts mentioned above, both Camatte and Horkheimer attempted to grapple with a very real problem for oppositional politics, that of the integration of labour into capital.

> Integration is the price which individuals and groups have to pay in order to flourish under capitalism. […] The revolutionary movement negatively reflects the situation which it is attacking.[60]

This problem, visible to Horkheimer already in the waning independence of working class organisations in 1920s and 1930s Germany, continued to develop throughout the 20th century and presents us today with a major impasse. Whilst the radical left has sought autonomy vis a vis unions, autonomy today has come to stand in for almost only ever *theoretical* alternatives – zones of partial independence from capital's integration.[61] Contained in Horkheimer's bold statement, '[w]hatever seeks to exist under a state of domination runs the danger of reproducing it', is a thoroughgoing challenge to these alternatives whether cultural, or political.[62] While the totalising and abstract nature of capital's domination needs to be put into question and the bespoke mechanisms of such integration examined in each period, there is a crucial kernel of truth which has potentially profound impacts for theories and practices of communist organisation. Such critiques were more common than we might think in the 1930s.

> What is behind the socialist parties and what assures their final victory in this vision of a new world; what ruins them all is that they must provide practical utility in the present capitalist day if they are to live at all. […] No complete socialist theory can exist until its practice has become usual. Until then every social phenomenon must be studied in its relation to capitalism. The system we live by is capitalism. We cannot put ourselves artificially in vacuo because we are socialists and wish to change the world. We continue to live in it. And it continues to make use of us.[63]

Not only do oppositional politics reproduce that which they oppose – in the sense that critique contributes to strengthening its opposite and in the sense that oppositional forms are structured and mediated by the form social reproduction takes as a whole – but more generally, initiatives which do not direct themselves towards dissolution of the totality in fact capitulate to it. Two little known critical communist interwar interventions, by Sam Moss

and Jack Common, both draw similar theoretical conclusions, but interestingly, in distinction from Horkheimer, Camatte and Collu's, these addressed themselves candidly and pragmatically to the problems for working class movements and their militants.[64] These are perennial problems for the left, but in a period in which there has been a revival of a discourse of 'enclaves' and alternatives beyond the reach of capital, such accounts provide a deflationary response to the promise of 'false exits'.[65]

Colletti's Morcelage

Lucio Colletti, writing in the late 1970s, interpreted critical theory's account of both reification and alienation as simple revulsion at scientific intellect and technology – a legacy of Bergsonism.

> The 'fetish' is the natural object investigated by science. 'Reification' or, as Bergson said, *le chosisme*, is the product of the scientific intellect that chops and breaks up (the famous *morcelage*) the fluid and 'living' unity of the real into the 'fictitious' outlines of the objects that have to be used for practical-technical action. Alienation, in short, is science, technology. After absorbing these themes, Lukács broadcast them in his turn, enriched with fresh appeal. The old repugnance of philosophical spiritualism towards production, technology and science, in a word, the horror of machines, was now cloaked by the fascination of the critique of modern bourgeois society.[66]

Thus, according to Colletti, like Henri Bergson, Adorno and Horkheimer sought to affirm a form of thinking and life which would unite reason and intuition in opposition to mere mechanism. For Donna V. Jones it was specifically the disappointment in any viable Marxian working class movement which led critical theory, despite concerted criticisms, 'back into the orbit of Bergsonism'.[67] Nonetheless, the attempt by Colletti, and even latterly by Lukács (against his earlier critical vitalism) in his post-war book, *The*

Destruction of Reason, to affirm reason and science amounts to merely the bad and uncritical affirmation of the opposite pole of a relation which cannot truthfully face suffering without extending it interminably. At their respective points of writing both Colletti (1970s) and Lukács (1950s) had each succumbed to forms of Stalinist apologia. Their uncritical affirmation of 'Marxist Science' was the kind of object the 'critical' part of critical theory (as a 'code word' for critical Marxism) had precisely formed itself against.[68] Adorno's critique of Bergson therefore draws upon the negative semblance of the parcelisation of workers' time 'whose only unity lies in being split':

> [T]he crass dichotomy of Bergson's two times does register the historic dichotomy between living experience and the objectified and repetitive labor process; his brittle doctrine of time is an early precipitation of the objective social crisis in the sense of time. The irreconcilability of *temps duree* and *temps espace* is the wound of that split consciousness whose only unity lies in being split. The naturalistic interpretation of *temps espace* can no more master this than the hypostasis of *temps duree*, in which the subject, flinching from reification, hopes in vain to preserve itself simply by being alive. The fact is that laughter – according to Bergson, the restoration of life from its conventional hardening – has long become the conventions' weapon against uncomprehended life, against the traces of something natural that has not been quite domesticated.[69]

However, Adorno's clinching second critique depends not on the labour process but on the critique of a consciousness which acts to restrain 'the traces of something natural' which escapes it. Therefore, it is reification – a conceptual process which is beholden to exchange – not the labour process, which is decisive in Adorno's critique.

Horkheimer's Swerve

Already in 1942 Horkheimer anticipated and rejected the undialectical position of Colletti and latter-day affirmationists, those who pile

up their managerial hopes on an acceleration of what they deem progressive tendencies within capitalism.[70]

> Revolution brings about what would happen without spontaneity in any case: the socialization of the means of production, planned management of production, and unlimited control of nature. And it also brings about what will not happen without resistance and constantly renewed efforts to strengthen freedom: *the end of exploitation.* Such an outcome is not a further acceleration of progress, but a qualitative leap out of the dimension of progress.[71]

Echoing Horkheimer's critique of progress, Adorno's retort to unitary theories of development (scientific socialism) turned upon the contingent nature of needs and their qualitative transformation in communism – which could draw from, augment and sustain many-sided and multi-directional development.

> The naïve supposition of an unambiguous development towards increased production is itself a piece of that bourgeois outlook which permits development in only one direction because, integrated into a totality, dominated by quantification, it is hostile to qualitative difference. If we imagine emancipated society as emancipation from such totality, then vanishing-lines come into view that have little in common with increased production and its human reflections.[72]

Whether activists affirm the development of productive forces under capitalism or claim it is capitalism which holds progress back, communism, as Horkheimer saw it, does not consist in a rational development of existing progress but a *swerve* out of its telos. It is, of course, a homologous rift or swerve (*l'ecart, Fr.*) which has more recently found a central place in the theories of contemporary partisans of communisation.[73] Following Jacques Camatte, the swerve is marked by a strong divergence from

'Marx's theoretical analysis of the role of the productive forces'.[74] For Théorie Communiste, it is a 'multiplication of swerves inside the class struggle between on the one hand the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class in its contradiction with capital and on the other the reproduction of capital which is implied by the very fact of being a class.'[75] Therefore it is not just a rift with general social technical development, but also a rift within the proletariat itself, against itself, against its place in capitalist social relations. As Endnotes write: '[c]ommunization occurs only at the limit of a struggle, in the rift that opens as this struggle meets its limit and is pushed beyond it […] [I]n any actual supersession of the capitalist class relation *we ourselves* must be overcome; "we" have no "position" apart from the capitalist class relation.'[76] These theorisations each take as their starting point the negativity of labour, by which 'the oppressed who today, as predicted by the theory, constitute the overwhelming majority of mankind' are, as Adorno expressed it, 'unable to experience themselves as a class.'[77] Rather than understanding this as an impenetrable limit, these contemporary tendencies express this limit as the very condition which revolution will 'overcome'.

Working Words

Here the linguistic is perhaps an important axis of clarification in the polemical debates around Bergsonism discussed above. Adorno had explicitly attacked Bergson's attitude to language in *Negative Dialectics*, believing the French philosopher's promise of forms of immediacy and intuition beyond the limitations of language to be entirely dependent on the rationality and mediations it scorned.[78] Language in Adorno's thought is inescapably social and individualising. The transcendental promise of Bergson's theory – pure becoming – was merely compensation for a reified present and death, as much a mystification as the reality it sought to displace. In this context it's perhaps interesting

to reflect on an account of language and class as theorised by the Situationist International in 1963:

> The problem of language is at the heart of all the struggles between the forces striving to abolish the present alienation and those striving to maintain it. It is inseparable from the very terrain of those struggles. We live within language as within polluted air. […] Words *work* – on behalf of the dominant organization of life. Yet they are not completely automated […] they contain forces that can upset the most careful calculations. Words coexist with power in a relation analogous to that which proletarians (in the modern as well as the classic sense of the term) have with power. Employed by it *almost* full time, exploited for every sense and nonsense that can be squeezed out of them, they still remain in some sense fundamentally alien to it.[79]

In the SI's account, which had developed deep parallels with the Frankfurt School's theory of state capitalism, the very internality of the subject to language, and the internality of proletarians to capital are brought into alignment. What is strange, as we will shortly see, is that Adorno concurred with the basic terms of this discussion of language (bourne out in his criticisms of Henri Bergson in *Negative Dialectics*), but not its account of class. Adorno remained committed to an account of the way thought could maintain separation even with what it is bound up in, but this insight appears to have ceased over time to be grounded in an accurate analysis of capitalist class relations. Rather, in the account of thought's inseparability from unfreedom the relationship to class is ever further submerged, resurfacing in his late work as forms of suffering structurally effaced by the social abstraction of exchange, whilst that abstraction was obviously dependent on labour, that did not accord labour or the labouring class agency per se in Adorno's thought.[80] Therefore, understanding exchange as the central and totalising social mediation in capitalist society,

Adorno looked to art as a form of mediation which acts in alterity with regards to capitalist exchange and the capitalist division of labour. This approach, for Adorno, resolved later into the dense parataxis of *Aesthetic Theory*, the melancholy science which implied permanently suspended redemption. Here he posited art as a critical signpost for a utopia made out of the material to hand in this world but pointing outside of it which could only be achieved by a praxis which is suggested by art's existence, but barely possible. It is of continuing significance that Adorno mediated his criticism of capitalism via aesthetic theory. With the increasing contemporary interest in variants of value critique, stemming from the approach to Marx developed by Adorno's former students (Helmut Reichelt, Hans-Georg Backhaus and Hans-Jürgen Krahl) in the late-1960s and 1970s, it seems necessary to connect up these developments of a critical Marxist tradition stemming from Adorno's work, with his views on aesthetics and art, through which he mediated his critique of political economy.[81]

The Coordination of the Dead

Reification in terms of political economy meant, for Adorno, that exchange-value had overcome use-value, intervention by the state in the economy meant that the free market was no longer free and intervention in the lives of workers (coercion by unions and a 'cushy' welfare state supporting the reproduction of those who worked and their families) meant that the proletariat's antagonism to capital splintered into individual self-preservation. Adorno's discussion of 'the subject as congealed technology', developed in *Minima Moralia* and *Aesthetic Theory,* is compelling, but problematic:

> The organic composition of man is growing. That which determines subjects as means of production and not as living purposes, increases with the proportion of machines to variable capital. […] Only when the process that begins with the metamorphosis of labour-power into a commodity

> has permeated men through and through and objectified each of their impulses as formally commensurable variations of the exchange relationship, is it possible for life to reproduce itself under the prevailing relations of production. Its consummate organization demands the coordination of people that are dead. The will to live finds itself dependent on the denial of the will to live: self-preservation annuls all life in subjectivity. […] Even what differs from technology in man is now being incorporated into it as a kind of lubrication. Psychological differentiation, originally the outcome both of the division of labour that dissects man according to sectors of the production process and of freedom, is finally itself entering the service of production. […] Here it is subjectivity itself, knowledge, temperament and powers of expression that are reduced to an abstract mechanism, functioning autonomously and divorced both from the personality of their 'owner' and from the material and concrete nature of the subject-matter in hand.[82]

This passage bears striking presentiments of the post-autonomist literature of the 2000s, particularly that authored by Paulo Virno, Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, and this is perhaps not surprising since Adorno was reading Marx's *Grundrisse,* during this period, a key text for Italian communists of 1970s. However, there are key distinctions. For Adorno, this state of affairs is the consequence of a revolution that was missed, a telos which will never arrive, history which will never begin. For the post-autonomists, whose theory also developed out of the context of class defeat, in different ways and with different emphasis, this close binding of the labouring subject to capital, its 'subsumption' of intellectual faculty to its ends, binds capital itself to the vicissitudes of the subject and 'life' or biopower (Paulo Virno).[83] For Adorno, however, at least at this point (1942) the law of value still exists: 'the individuated function in the modern economy as the mere agents of the law of value.'[84] For others, Negri, Virno, even Jacques

Camatte, the developments of the 1970s, the autonomisation of finance from productive industry presages a suspension of the law of value and the end of a specific form of proletarian agency.[85] Whether this was latterly true for Adorno remains the subject of some debate. Later texts such as 'Towards a New Manifesto' (with Max Horkheimer, 1956) and 'Late Capitalist or Industrial Society?' (1968), suggest this was the case. Yet, most likely this was arrived at from a heterodox position not necessarily assimilable to the periodisation others (e.g. Antonio Negri) arrived at in the 1970s. Diverse formulations of the idea that exchange-value had overcome use-value: 'The goods made available nowadays are a kind of pseudo-consumer goods; exchange-value is substituted for use-value'[86], occur across a number of post-war texts. As Gillian Rose points out, without a theory of surplus-value, it is difficult, even prohibitive, to ground the formation of classes. By 1968 Adorno would write:

> everything socially existent today is so thoroughly mediated, that even the moment of mediation is itself distorted by the totality. There is no standpoint outside of the whole affair which can be referred to, from which the ghost could be called by its name […] The false identity between the constitution of the world and its inhabitants through the total expansion of technics is leading in the direction of the confirmation of the relations of production, whose true beneficiaries one searches for in vain, just as proletarians have become invisible.[87]

A Nothing With a Vengeance

The title for this essay is drawn from a passage from Adorno's posthumous work *Aesthetic Theory*.[88] The nothing implied in this case is the nothing of the proletarian outside of the wage relation, her negativity vis a vis capital as its antithesis in a polar relation. As reiterated above the proletariat must go beyond, abolish, itself to end its exploitation and become something else. The nothing

implied by Adorno involves a different, but not unrelated, form of self-abolition, in art, whereby 'art must go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to that concept.'

The invisibility of the proletariat, the non-contradiction between the forces of production and relations of production, were merely the latest in a long sequence of formulations emanating from the Frankfurt School which, by reducing the ontology of productive labour to relations of exchange, contribute to a sense of total social control by a unitary global force rather than a social relation which is underpinned by the contradiction between (an automatic subject) capital and labour – a subject (which shows signs of both automatism and agency).[89] Whilst capitalist reproduction and the reproduction of labour-power increasingly diverge, there is no reproduction of capital without reproduction of the capital-labour relation. For Adorno and the Frankfurt School the fundamental mistake was to seek a 'standpoint outside' the capital-labour relation. This outside never existed. It was not proposed by Marx. Rather, the position of labour-power from the standpoint of capital is *nothing* – the negating nothing that counts from the standpoint of revolution. Marx wrote of the proletariat in relation to private property:

> Proletariat and wealth are opposites; as such they form a single whole. They are both creations of the world of private property. [...] The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the negative side of the antithesis, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property.[90]

Art's dialectical relationship to enlightenment means for Adorno that it participates in enlightenment's modernising secularising movement but also opposes it by revolting against itself on the basis of its own (self) interests. Inscribed in its continuation is

the 'neediness of the world' and that neediness is the trace of historical and present suffering and domination. Moreover, by understanding art's condition as critically resistant to instrumental reason, he asserted that an 'objective need' for art is contained in the contradiction that 'a realized materialism would at the same time be the abolition of materialism'.[91] This would appear to counter the once avant-garde commonplace that realised communism would mean the dissolution of art, because this thought perhaps concedes too little, on the one hand, to the more obscure currents within the Russian avant-garde which carried out a sophisticated critique of capitalist use and technology and, on the other, Adorno's dialectical approach to art and negation.[92]

We might usefully think this ostensible unfreedom through two formulations of 'double freedom': the first, that formulated by Karl Marx as the double freedom of labour-power, free to sell itself as commodity, free from ownership of property or means of production, to work or starve.[93] Art, on the other hand, according to Kant, must be doubly free in an almost symmetrically opposite sense. Free from wage labour, but also, like labour, free of having a commodity or other service to sell, though 'satisfied and amused without looking to some other purpose'.[94] These are each forms of 'autonomy', but they lend themselves to further analysis rather than affirmation. Before capital this 'subject' did not exist, outside of wage relations this subject is 'nothing'. The subject, as a mere automaton would be an expensive piece of machinery for capital to maintain, incapable of producing value. The values fed into it would simply be emptied out back into the production process, a zero sum game. Capital can only put to work – extract surplus-value from – a thinking subject. I suggest it is from this position that we think and work. There is no total social domination, but instead totally dysfunctional social domination always only partially integrating its subjects. Whereas for Horkheimer in the 1920s, 'The economic process which denies employment to a large part of the population from birth on, and dooms it to a hopeless existence, necessarily produces

and reproduces it'[95]. In the present production of a global surplus population, there is a widening disconnection between the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of labour-power.

Nonetheless everywhere alternative forms of reproduction are laid to waste or reintegrated back into capitalist accumulation. The disintegration of the binds between capital and (non)labour is increasingly a police matter. The 'law of value' still maintains, but since it is a limit capital can overcome only in an illusory sense, this is the scene of desperate crises. As a shrinking base of productive capital supports an increasingly wobbly edifice, would-be workers must bend themselves increasingly out of shape to have even a passing chance of being employed. Work, employment, takes on dimensions of voluntarism. Art, for example appears as a ground for the 'real life training' for this speculative work. It partially absorbs the privileged part of the surplus. This is not enough for us. There is still *'tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more.'*[96]

Adorno and Horkheimer's perspective in the mid-1940s concurs with that of George Sorel, that '[a]rt is an anticipation of the kind of work that ought to be carried out in a highly productive state of society.'[97] Adorno's analysis of the fate of art is again rooted in his understanding of a philosophy of history predicated on (in line with that of his colleagues at the Frankfurt School) the failure of the German revolution of 1918–1919 – the path to a 'logical' revolution having being averted, a standpoint which fights for the emancipation of suffering life being impossible to isolate from what it opposes.[98] Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt were even able to give a precise date, 1932, to critical theory's jettisoning of the proletariat and shift of focus to the individual.[99] In the face of a first defeated and then integrated working class, the totalitarian 'eradication of difference' and life as mere 'appearance', the 'social force of liberation' increasingly occupied the 'individual sphere' – a sort of subterranean and subjective ante-chamber to which resistance has retreated – and anticipates, through art, a social practice, movement or 'a spirit' which could redeem it. It is

a perspective which sees at every point the imprint of exchange relations upon any autonomy or alterity, but can barely glimpse, in their complex distortion, class relations which are perceived only removed and abstracted at the level of international relations, a police order and in the supremacy of exchange.[100]

To the extent that Adorno understood the transformation of labour-power into surplus-value ('labour power into commodity'), as the relationship from which the exchange relation autonomised itself into the society of exchange, it appears that he no longer saw it as necessary to re-examine that basic relationship and its development, but instead focussed upon the complex relationship of the subject and the social agencies through which it would be hitherto exploited and dominated. Therefore, in their preparatory philosophical discussions for the writing of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno would discuss 'the insight that the individual itself is "a history of class struggles"'.[101] Adorno's conception in *Minima Moralia* of contemporary subjects 'as formally commensurable variations of the exchange relationship' is a correlate to this. Yet whilst our current social field supports such an insight, it is the resurgent legibility of macro-economic structural dynamics in our own present and recent past which evidently gives the lie to the appearance of 21st century capitalism as being only *apparently* founded upon a war between monadic self-augmenting subjects. The subject as theatre of class struggle is now thoroughly interpellated in contemporary culture, it is the means to most rapidly individualise what is social and as such allies itself with contemporary accumulation (the privatisation of the socius). Adorno's melancholy over the fate of art was at least partially caught up with his resignation with regard to the integration of class antagonism by a phantasmatic, or at least temporary, monopoly-form. Sharing some basic presuppositions, Manfredo Tafuri's account of avant-garde art's capitulation to 'the plan' provides an architecturally nuanced parallel, its fate – that of the plan – instead shows us that neither the fortunes of art, nor that of capital, are fixed by their present telos.[102]

Since there is no positive pole to affirm in labour, art now lurches between negativity and affirmation, frequently affirming 'alternatives' which turn out to be nothing of the sort: either limited and gestural, readily commodifiable, or future areas of growth for the state: 'flight itself always degenerates into a convulsive repetition of the very situation from which he would flee.'[103] At the same time, the state's ability to incorporate (let alone reproduce) cultural forms is increasingly weak and circumspect. Thus the redistribution of wealth upwards also affords an effective reprivatisation of culture driven by the spread of private patrons, collectors, foundations, international fairs and art biennials staged by states which are only fig-leaves for private wealth. Even these prey off conditions in which the reproduction of their workers, even tertiary 'art workers', are not assured. Since the same private wealth drives developments in the formerly social-democratic countries, these developments return as the repressed of the former welfare states, with 'art' providing a sheen to the new insecurity being generalised. As such, art production, even when more capital circulates in its realm – even in professionalised guise – follows the falling wage and the break up of any remaining barriers to commodification all the way down. As Thomas Piketty puts it, 'the past devours the future'.[104] The social relations of capitalism are reproduced but at the cost of stifling human development – the satisfaction and expansion of human needs – there is more stuff, but the substance of this stuff: human and material, is increasingly adulturated, reproduced cheaper and cheaper. Thus, much of what passes as politics calls for 'purity' of 'race', gender, nationality and participates in a 'conservative politics of antagonistic reproduction', reproduction of a few against many.[105] Art participates in this form of 'development' by providing a speculative sector which absorbs and consumes a part of the surplus money which cannot be spent in production. As it does so it selectively distributes and renews the privilege of selective reproduction. Art's solutionism at least makes transparent its own subjectivism, while solutions posing as socialist or communist claim the semblance of an objectivity

which would efface their own subjectivism. However, neither can be true, since the individuation in which art participates is 'specialist' from the side of experience, whilst the solutions of socialists empower a specialised hierarchy of order-givers. Art is mimetic, even anticipatory, of 'solutions' but it can, in its current form, neither act on a systemic level, nor remain meaningful as art when it jettisons its course of critical negation.

Forms of cultural dissonance may still 'displace and and estrange the world', but since the 1960s, art, increasingly self-critical of its own conditions of reception and legitimation, has been drawn closer into the accelerating orbit of commodification but lies much further from that of the state.[106] Accelerating commodification is itself a symptom of technological developments which undermine the basis of capital accumulation. The prospects for art are therefore increasingly enchained to an upward transfer of assets, a concentration of wealth, which takes the form of a violent redistribution rather than an expanding circuit of production and reproduction. That movement falters or ceases only when practical activity compliments and is complimented by it.

1
This is work I began in dialogue with Marina Vishmidt and our discussions continue to inform my work in this area.

2
In Marx's words, 'With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relation between workers and capitalists.' 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' in Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol.1*, (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London and New York: Penguin, 1990, p.1035.

3
Marx writes, 'one form always precedes another, although the second form, the more highly developed one, can provide the foundations for the introduction of the first in new branches of industry.' 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', Ibid., p.1025.

4
Here I am indebted to the lucid discussion of the temporality of subsumption by Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, 'if it is implausible to posit a homogenous stage of development across all labour processes then the claim that all of 'life', or 'the social' has been really subsumed is even more dubious.' Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, 'Time and Subsumption', unpublished talk transcript, available: http://

reificationofpersonsandpersonification ofthings.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/time-and-subsumption-andres.pdf Much is made in Saenz De Sicilia's text of the lack of evidence of stagist development in specific sectors such as the extractive industries, see for example, Jeffrey W. Mantz, 'Improvisational economies: Coltan production in the eastern Congo', *Social Anthropology*, Vol.16, No.1, February 2008, pp.34-50.

5

Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays,* (Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell), New York: Continuum, (1972) 2002, pp.188–243, p.193.

6

See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* (Trans. E.B. Ashton), London and New York: Continuum, 2007, p.10, p.12, p.51, p.120, p.150 and p.152.

7

I will of course revisit this point throughout this paper, but a discussion of the key influence of Friedrich Pollock's theory of State Capitalism on the Frankfurt School lies somewhat outside its scope, see Manfred Gangl, 'The Controversy Over Friedrich Pollock's State Capitalism', *History of the Human Sciences,* 2016, Vol.29 No.2 pp.23–41.

8

Reijen and Bransen provide a summary of substitutions between editions which highlight this turn. Willem van Reijen and Jan Bransen, 'The Disappearance of Class History in "Dialectic of Enlightenment": A Commentary on the Textual Variants (I947 and I944)', in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* (Trans. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp.248-252, p.251.

9

As Chad Kautzer points out: '"Reflections on Class Theory" (1942), "Society" (1965), and "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" (1968), as well as his *Negative Dialectics* (1966), render this characterization of Adorno [as distancing himself from Marx's work] questionable'. Chad Kautzer, 'Marx's Influence on the Early Frankfurt School', in M.J. Thompson (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp.43–65, p.52.

10

This being said, I concur with the point that 'the alienation of labour is a necessary condition for the realisation of human potential through communism'. I am grateful for the rich exchanges with Mattin and Reid Kotlas around this topic. For extended discussions of types of alienation in Marx's work in this book, see the essays by Mattin, Rob Lucas, Négation, Théorie Communiste and Nadia Bou Ali.

11

Within Jan Hoff's extensive project of connecting global currents of Marxist or Marxian thought his contestation of the term, 'western Marxism', is extremely compelling. C.f. Jan Hoff, 'Internationalizing Marx: An Interview with Jan Hoff', https://viewpointmag.com/2014/05/21/internationalizing-marx-an-interview-with-jan-hoff/ In this text I shall use 'Western Marxism', without necessarily validating the term, to refer to Perry Anderson's characterisation because it refers to a matrix of thinkers (Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Antonio Gramsci) who underpin the debates under discussion. C.f. Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism.* London: Verso, 2016.

12

Karl Marx, *Capital Vol.I*, (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London and New York: Penguin, 1990, p.165. Gillian Rose notes that in Marx's work, 'Sometimes he stresses that a relation between men appears as a relation between things, sometimes that "value" appears to be a property of the commodity and thus a thing, sometimes that the commodity takes on a will and life of its own and becomes personified.' Gillian Rose, 'The Lament Over Reification', in *The Melancholy Science*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978, p.30.

13

Ibid., p.47 and p.31.

14

Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* (Trans, Gillian Rose) quoted in Ibid., p.46.

15

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology,* London: Macmillan, 1978.

16

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* (Trans. E.B. Ashton), New York: Continuum, 2007.

17

Gillian Rose, 'Lament Over Reification', op. cit., p.47.

18

Chad Kautzer's account of development of reification suggests that a key source for these ideas was Marx's own preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.' Karl Marx, 'Preface', A *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol.29, 261-265. New York: International Publishers quoted in Chad Kautzer, 'Marx's Influence on the Early Frankfurt School', op. cit., p.49.

19

In 1926 Yevgeni Alekseyevich Preobrazhensky proposed in his book, *The New Economics*, the Russian State undertake a form of 'socialist primitive accumulation'. Initially criticised by Trotsky and the left opposition, in 1930 Joseph Stalin explicitly endorsed a similar approach to that of Preobrazhensky and this appears to have set the tone for the development of the USSR throughout the 1930s. See Alexander Erlich, 'Preobrazhenski and the Economics of Soviet Industrialism', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol.64 No.1 (Feb 1950) pp.57-88 and James R. Millar, 'A Note on Primitive Accumulation in Marx and Preobrazhensky', *Soviet Studies* 30, No.3 (July 1978), pp.384-93; both articles are discussed in a recent article, Devin Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', *October* No.145, Summer 2013, pp.3-37.

20

'The failure of the revolutionary workers movement in Europe, despite the favorable objective conditions for it, created a sense of urgency to critically analyze the national cultural forces that inhibited revolutionary praxis. This was the project of Western Marxism.' On this point Chad Kautzer also cites Perry Anderson's judgement that 'The "hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole," […] is "that it is a product of defeat"'. Perry Anderson quoted in Chad Kautzer, 'Marx's Influence on the Early Frankfurt School', in M.J. Thompson (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp.43–65, p.48 and p.60.

21

'Results...' op. cit., pp.1024-1025.

22

Ibid.

23

A point emphasised by Andrés Saenz De Sicilia (see note 2) and Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes* II, http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption. The full quote: 'With the real subsumption of labour under capital there takes place a complete [and a constant, continuous, and repeated] revolution in the mode of production itself, in the productivity of labour and in the relation between capitalist and worker.' Karl Marx, *Results of the Direct Production Process* (Trans. Ben Fowkes), 1864, available, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/economic/ch02a.htm#469a

24

This is precisely the dimension which Jacques Camatte finds contradictory in Marx's account of real subsumption: 'Firstly one must note that the commodity as product of capital presupposes a change in the form of production. In particular, the commodity in simple commodity production was the goal of production, the real product of production. However, in capitalism this is no longer the case and the commodity is only apparently the product of production. The real product is surplus-value.' The quote continues: 'But to affirm this is to

deny that capital really dominates the conditions of production, production itself. Really, it would be the same as emphasizing the action of man, of the proletariat, which really did produce the surplus-value. As we have seen, when capital attains total domination, it appears as though it creates the excess of value itself. This is why the transformation of surplus-value into profit, and the rate of surplus-value into the rate of profit, derives directly from capital's domination: one is indissolubly linked with the other. This is why Marx, in the *Grundrisse* writes of interest-bearing capital when analysing the transformation of surplus-value into profit.' Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx*, (Trans. David Brown), Unpopular Books, London 1988, pp.54–55, a transcribed version of this edition is availaible at http://www.marxists.org.

25

This would be the case with so-called 'accelerationists', whose reading of Marx is dated to say the least. No need for any reference here, the extraordinary technology made available to us all will provide.

26

For accounts of Friedrich Pollock's work at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and influence on the Frankfurt School see Manfred Gangl, 'The Controversy Over Friedrich Pollock's State Capitalism', op. cit. and Ross Wolfe, 'On the Work of Friedrich Pollock', available: http://thecharnelhouse.org/2014/11/05/on-the-work-of-friedrich-pollock/. On Ernst Bloch's philosophy of history see the compelling comparison between Bloch and Lukács, Alberto Toscano, 'Ad Hominem: Antinomies of Radical Philosophy', *Filozofski vestnik*, Volume/Letnik XXIX, No.2, 2008, pp.137–153. On Erich Fromm's relationship to the Frankfurt Institute, see Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future,* Dordrecht: Sense Publishers, 2014.

27

Max Horkheimer, 'The Impotence of the German Working Class', *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, (Trans. Michael Shaw), New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, pp.61–62.

28

'Traditional and Critical Theory', op. cit.

29

Friedrich Pollock, 'Die gegenwärtige Lage des Kapitalismus und die Aussichten einer planwirtschaftlichen Neuordnung' [The Present State of Capitalism and the Prospects of a New Planned Economy], *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung I*(1), (1932), pp.8–27 and Friedrich Pollock, (1933) 'Bemerkungen zur Wirtschaftskrise' [Remarks on the Economic Crisis], *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung II*(3), pp.321–54, as discussed in 'The Controversy Over Friedrich Pollock's State Capitalism', op. cit, p.25–26.

30

The contradictions which emerged between adherents of the Frankfurt School's positions between the 1920s and 1940s are noted by Matthias Rothe & Bastian Ronge, the editors of a special issue on the philosophy and political economy of the Frankfurt School: 'National Socialism (and not least the situation in the Soviet Union) gave a painful demonstration of the fact that what appeared to be the end of a free market economy, of classes and of the private disposition over property was entirely compatible with brutal domination. Under National Socialism, politics (that is: the state) interfered massively with the free play of economic forces.' Matthias Rothe & Bastian Ronge, 'The Frankfurt School: Philosophy and (Political) economy', *History of the Human Sciences*, 2016, Vol.29 No.2, pp.3–22, p.10.

31

Friedrich Pollock, 'Is National Socialism a New Order', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science,* Vol.9 No.2, pp.440–5. 1941.

32

Anson Rabinbach provides an excellent discussion of this debate within the Frankfurt School, Anson G. Rabinbach,

'Toward a Marxist Theory of Fascism and National Socialism: A Report on Developments in West Germany'. *New German Critique*, No.3 1974, pp.127–53. Recent research shows the question of the 'primacy of politics' under National Socialism to be much more complex and mutable during different phases of the regime and its decline, see Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*. New York: Penguin Books, 2008.

33

Todd Cronan, 'The Political Ontology of Unemployment: Why No One Need Apply', http://nonsite.org/editorial/the-political-ontology-of-unemployment-why-no-one-need-apply; Jacob Bard-Rosenberg, 'Thinking Need from California: The 1942 Seminars of the Frankfurt School and the Brecht Circle', http://prolapsarian.tumblr.com/post/91872887272/thinking-need-from-california-the-1942-seminars; and Richard Wolin, 'Introduction to the Discussion of "Need and Culture in Nietzsche"', *Constellations* Vol.8, No.1, 2001, pp.127-129. See footnote 47 for further discussion of these texts.

34

Capital and Community, op. cit.

35

Ibid.

36

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Fish in water', *Minima Moralia*, London: Verso, p.23.

37

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* (Trans. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford University Press, 2002, p.30.

38

Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol.3*, (Trans. David Fernbach), London: Penguin, p.491. (My emphasis).

39

Ibid.

40

Cf. Max Horkheimer, 'On the Sociology of Class Relations' (September-November 1943), (Trans. Todd Cronan), http://nonsite.org/the-tank/max-horkheimer-and-the-sociology-of-class-relations and 'On the Critique of Political Economy', in *Dawn and Decline - Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, op. cit., p.231; Jacques Camatte and Gianni Collu, 'On Organisation' (1972), in *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*, New York: Autonomedia, 1995, pp.19-28. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr was first to highlight Horkheimer's theory of rackets in the context of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and its implications for the theory of state capitalism. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, 'Editors' Afterword: The Position of "Dialectic of Enlightenment" in the Development of Critical Theory' in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (Trans. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp.217–247. Manfred Gangl discusses the theory of rackets as a background to Adorno and Horkheimer's work on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'The Controversy Over Friedrich Pollock's State Capitalism', op. cit., pp.32–33.

41

Max Horkheimer, 'On the Sociology of Class Relations' (September-November 1943) (Trans. Todd Cronan), http://nonsite.org/the-tank/max-horkheimer-and-the-sociology-of-class-relations Adorno's contribution on the same theme also remained unpublished. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory', (Trans. Rodney Livingstone), in Rolf Tiedmann (Ed.), *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, Stanford Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2003, pp.93–110.

42

Horkheimer, Ibid.

43

'Reflections on Class Theory', op. cit., p.97. Horkheimer asserts, 'the idea of antagonism between the international proletariat and any system of domination is completely superseded by the concepts tied to the disputes of power between the various monopolies.' 'On the Sociology of Class Relations', op. cit

44

Adorno's comments on the 'fragmented' state of workers who 'are unable to experience themselves as a class.' are promising in terms of developing a theory of rifts and forms of domination and privilege within the class itself in their full negativity, yet these remain themselves sketchy and fragmentary, 'Reflections on Class Theory', op. cit., p.97.

45

An exemplary model for this kind of study is provided by a close interlocuter of the Frankfurt School, Siegfried Kracauer's study of the rise of white collar workers in Germany in the 1930s Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany,* London and New York: Verso, 1998.

46

'Editor's Afterword', p.231.

47

Schematically we could say, that this was obviously a rather hasty and narrow reading over-focussed on consumption. Moreover whilst the capitalist state (USA) could be seen to achieve this symbolically it would be both at the expense of annihilating external populations in Vietnam and explosive frictions between internal populations e.g. Watts and other urban riots, not to mention the long-term consequences of the growth of domestic debt this period of US global expansion required. A humorous gloss on this discussion can be read in Todd Cronan, 'The Political Ontology of Unemployment', op. cit. a more sensitive account is given by Jacob Bard-Rosenberg, 'Thinking need from 'Thinking Need from California', op. cit.

48

Max Horkheimer, 'The Authoritatian State' (1942), in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (Eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978, pp.95–117, p.97.

49

'This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. […] But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis.' Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol.3*, op. cit., p.959.

50

Theodor Adorno 'Theses on Need' (1942), (Trans. Keston Sutherland), *Quid*, No.16, pp.40-44, p.40.

51

Herbert Marcuse, 'Socialism in the Developed Countries' in Herbert Marcuse, Douglas Kellner, and Clayton Pierce. *Marxism, Revolution and Utopia: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 6.* Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2014, p.170.

52

Paul Mattick, 'One Dimensional Man in Class Society', (1972), available, https://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1972/marcuse.htm

53

Ibid.

54

Ibid.

55

Ibid.

56

Typical here would be the following statements by Adorno: 'All history is the history of class struggles because it was always the same thing, namely, prehistory.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory', op. cit., p.94; 'By extending the concept of class to prehistory […] The venerable unity of traditional structure, the natural insight of hierarchy in a society that was presented as having grown organically, turned out to be a unity of interested parties', Ibid., p.93; 'the forces of production are not the deepest substratum of man, but represent his historical form adapted to the production of commodities.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'Sur l'Eau', *Minima Moralia*, op. cit., p.156*;* and 'If all the oppression that man has ever inflicted on man culminates in the modern age in the cold inhumanity of free wage labor, then the past is revealed in conditions and things – the romantic contrast to industrial reason – as the trace of former suffering' , 'Reflections on Class Theory', op. cit., p.94. Some sympathy is due, especially where such formulations de-nature a perspective which narrates the history of 'natural' successive hierarchical societies. In fact this is their primary point, however, whilst they contribute to a reading of the presuppositions for capitalism to develop at all they also indicate a framework for reading history in which the historical specificity of capitalism

can be lost and pure transhistorical domination be grasped as trumping the specific and distinct wrongs of present society.

57

'This much is true, that with the return to the old free enterprise system, the entire horror would start again from the beginning under new management.' i.e. neoliberalism. Max Horkheimer, 'The Authoritarian State', in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (Eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978, pp.95–117, p.117.

58

Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex'. *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, 1975, pp.157–210, p.165.

59

These remain especially useful to the study of authoritarian tendencies within liberal and post-liberal states, cf. Alberto Toscano, 'Notes on Late Fascism', February 2017, http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/notes-late-fascism

60

Max Horkheimer, 'The Authoritarian State', (1942), op. cit., p.99.

61

The significance of the history of unions in Germany and the rise of National Socialism to the Frankfurt School thinkers is discussed below in note 99.

62

Ibid., p.98.

63

Jack Common, 'Fake Left', London: Working Press, 1992, (First published in the *Adelphi* 19 March 1933).

64

Sam Moss, 'The Impotence of the Revolutionary Group' (originally published in Living Marxism, 1939), available https://libcom.org/library/impotence-of-revolutionary-group-international-council-correspondence-moss and Ibid.

65

See Endnotes, 'Error', in *Bad Feelings*, London: Bookworks, 2016, n.p. and 'False Totalities Don't Have Exits: Introduction to Error', in this book, p.500.

66

Lucio Colletti, 'From Hegel to Marcuse', http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/colletti1.html A critical note on Colletti's account can be read in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (Eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, op. cit., pp.512-513 Note #1.

67

Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Negritude, Vitalism, and Modernity,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, pp.91–92. The orbit of Bergsonism was hardly avoidable, given his widespread influence on 20th century culture particularly modernist avant-garde art. Despite Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno all individually making specific critiques of Henri Bergson's work, a rarely acknowledged detail in this discussion is the fact that the Paris office of the Frankfurt School was actually established with Bergson's financial assistance, see Michael Weingrad, 'The College of Sociology and the Institute of Social Research', *New German Critique,* No.84 (2001) pp.129-61, p.136. Donna Jones's account is fascinating, nevertheless her exacting intellectual history of Bergson's influence, at least on this point about the Frankfurt School, fails to reflect sufficiently upon structural factors such as the increasing biologisation of class rule driven by the necessity of closer capital and state control over its populations. The idea that Horkheimer and Adorno shifted the prospects for an emancipatory politics to the 'biological dimension' is further supported by Paul Piccone, 'General Introduction', Eike Gebhardt and Andrew Arato (Eds.), *Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978, p.xvii. For a sensitive account of the surviving influence of this dynamic on communist theory in the 1970s, see Carlos Lagos P., 'Spanish Translator's Introduction' to Franco Santini, *Apocalypse and Survival,* https://libcom.org/article/apocalypse-and-survival-francesco-santini

68

Horkheimer's inaugural address to the Frankfurt Institute in 1931 already laid

out a research agenda for critical theory which rejected deterministic accounts of materialism ('Marx's Influence on the Early Frankfurt School', op. cit., p.51), one which was substantially developed in the direction of a two fold questioning of positivist objectivity in a later text which defined the course of critical theory: 'The world which is given to the individual and which he must accept and take into account is [...] a product of the activity of society as a whole. The objects we perceive in our surroundings-cities, villages, fields, and woods-bear the mark of having been worked on by man [...] Even the way they see and hear is inseparable from the social life-process as it has evolved over the millennia. The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity.' Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and critical theory', in *Max Horkheimer, Critical Theory: Selected Essays,* (Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and others), New York: Continuum, (1937) 2002*,* pp.88–243, p.200.

69

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* op. cit., p.334.

70

Cf. Benjamin Noys' critique of various forms of affirmationism. Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative a Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010 and 'Abandoning Accelerationism? Two Exits', Accelerationism Workshop, Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster, 23 May 2014, available, https://www.academia.edu/7167970/Abandoning_Accelerationism_Two_Exits

71

Max Horkheimer, 'The Authoritarian State', op. cit., p.107.

72

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Sur l'Eau'*, Minima Moralia*, op. cit., p.156.

73

Théorie Communiste, 'Théorie de l'écart', *Théorie communiste*, No.73, September, 2005, available, https://files.libcom.org/files/TC20.pdf

74

Jacques Camatte, 'The Wandering of Humanity', (Trans. Fredy Perlman), 1973, available, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jacques-camatte-the-wandering-of-humanity

75

Theorie Communiste, 'The Present Moment', 2011, https://libcom.org/library/present-moment-theorie-communiste

76

Endnotes 'The Moving Contradiction' in *Endnotes II: Misery and the Value Form,* http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-moving-contradiction

77

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory', op. cit., p.97.

78

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., pp.8–9.

79

Situationist International, 'All the King's Men', *Internationale Situationniste,* No.8 (Paris, January 1963).

80

This is supported by Frank Engster's account which he argues applies equally to Lukács, Adorno and Sohn-Rethel. 'While traditional Marxism, following Lenin's epistemological theory of reflection posits that social mediation and the connection between the economy and subjectivity are based on labour, Lukács, Adorno and Sohn-Rethel regarded the commodity-form as the ultimate basis of social mediation.' Frank Engster, 'Subjectivity and its Crisis', in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol.29 No.2, pp.77–95, p.80.

81

I owe this suggestion to Stewart Martin. It is an approach also suggested by the recent work of Werner Bonefeld*, Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason,* Delhi, London, Los Angeles, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. An audio recording of a recent seminar by Riccardo Bellofiore

and Tommaso Redolfi Riva dealing specifically with the approaches developed by Helmut Reichelt, Hans-Georg Backhaus and Hans-Jürgen Krahl out of Adorno's teaching can be accessed here: Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, 'Die Neue Marx-Lektüre: putting the critique of political economy back into the critique of society', available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43Q3n3fwDUA&ab_channel=FreeAssociation this was subsequently written up as an article: *Radical Philosophy*, No.189, Jan/Feb 2015.

82

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Novissimum Organum', *Minima Moralia*, op. cit., pp.229–230.

83

Guido Baldi, 'Negri Beyond Marx', *Midnight Notes,* No.8, 1985, p.35

84

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Novissimum Organum', op. cit., p.229.

85

Some reflections on Camatte's work of this period can be read in the following essay and presentation, 'Capitalist Limits …', http://saladofpearls.wordpress.com/2014/03/22/capitalist-limits-from-the-probability-of-exhaustion-to-the-exhaustion-of-probability/ and http://saladofpearls.wordpress.com/2013/12/22/notes-on-subsumption/ An archive of English translations of Camatte's work can be accessed at http://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/

86

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'Towards a New Manifesto' (1956), *New Left Review,* No.65, September–October, 2010.

87

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?', English translation by Dennis Redmond of an address Adorno gave to the 1968 German Sociological Congress.

88

'If all art is the secularization of transcendence, it participates in the dialectic of enlightenment. Art has confronted this dialectic with the aesthetic conception of antiart; indeed, without this element art is no longer thinkable. This implies nothing less than that art must go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to that concept. The idea of its abolition does it homage by honoring its claim to truth. Nevertheless, the survival of undermined art is not only an expression of cultural lag, that ever sluggish revolution of the superstructure. The source of art's power of resistance is that a realized materialism would at the same time be the abolition of materialism, the abolition of the domination of material interests. In its powerlessness, art anticipates a spirit that would only then step forth. To this corresponds an objective need, the neediness of the world, which is contrary to the subjective and now no more than ideological individual need for art. Art can find its continuation nowhere else than in this objective need.' Theodor Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, New York: Continuum, 1997, p.37.

89

This sequence would include Max Horkheimer, 'The Impotence of the German Working Class' (1927) and 'The Authoritarian State' (1940), Friedrich Pollock, 'State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations' (1941) and 'Is National Socialism a New Order' (1941), Theodor W. Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory' (1942), Herbert Marcuse, 'Liberation from the Affluent Society' (1967), Theodor W. Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?' (1968). Important here is that substantial emphasis is given to Friedrich Pollock's work on state capitalism at the Frankfurt School. According to Ross Wolfe and others he was the overwhelming influence on matters of political economy for Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. A partial account and links to many of the texts cited above is, Ross Wolfe, 'On the Work of Friedrich Pollock', available: http://thecharnelhouse.org/2014/11/05/on-the-work-of-friedrich-pollock/

90

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company,* 1844.

91

Ibid., p.37.

92

Assertions of such positions are discussed in Anthony Iles & Marina Vishmidt, 'Work Work Your Thoughts and Therein See a Siege', *Communisation and its Discontents*, New York: Autonomedia, 2011 and Anthony Iles & Marina Vishmidt, 'Make Whichever You Find Work', *Variant*, No.41, Spring 2011, https://romulusstudio.com/variant/41texts/ilesvishmidt41.html

93

Marx writes: 'For the conversion of his money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realisation of his labour-power.' Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol.1*, London: Penguin, 1990, p.272.

94

Kant writes: 'Fine art must be free art in a double sense: it must be free in the sense of not being a mercenary occupation and hence a kind of labour, whose magnitude can be judged, exacted or paid for according to a certain standard; but fine art must also be free in the sense that, though the mind is occupying itself, yet it feels satisfied and amused (independently of any pay) without looking to some other purpose.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (Trans. Werner S. Pluhar), Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987, §51, p.190.

95

Max Horkheimer, 'The Impotence of the German Working Class' in *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, (Trans. Michael Shaw), New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, pp.61–65, p.65.

96

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Sur l'Eau', *Minima Moralia*, op. cit., p.156.

97

Georges Sorel, 'Introduction: Letter to Daniel Halévy', *Reflections on Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.33. This would chime with Max Horkheimer's somewhat quizzical formulation in *Dawn and Decline*, a passage in which he also mentions in passing the term 'communisation',: 'I believe that mankind will only have so-called nobler needs, needs beyond its natural ones if these remain unsatisfied. Perhaps I am wrong. That would mean that the idea is not tied to a lack, love for justice not to prevailing injustice, magnanimity not to misery and power.' Max Horkheimer, 'Philosophy of History, A Speculation', *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, (Trans. Michael Shaw), New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, p.189.

98

Endnotes, 'Communisation and Value Form Theory', *Endnotes* II, https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/communisation-and-value-form-theory

99

'As of 1932, the thinkers of Critical Theory practiced by the Frankfurt School no longer considered the proletariat as the historical subject of emancipation. They observed how Communist unions and National Socialist organised labour joined forces in the Berlin transportation strike of 1932. How could it have happened that workers possessed no immunity to fascism? Since then, the adherents of Critical Theory – along with the authors of the book before you – have discontinued investigating the emancipatory potentials within entire social groups and instead have turned to consider the raw material of these potentials, the ruptured, yet still lively INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS located beneath the level of the whole person.' Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy,* (Trans. Richard Langston et al.), New York: Zone Books, 2014, p.220. The adjective 'lively' used here comes into some relief if we bear in mind the above discussion of traces of vitalism in the critical theory tradition and the figure of labour-power as the 'dead' in the passages of *Minima Moralia* cited above.

100

This is supported by several commentators. Specifically on Adorno and Horkheimer's partnership and their position in the 1940s see the 'Editor's Afterword' to *The Dialectic of*

Enlightenment, 'The hope for a radical transformation of conditions, indeed, any confidence in the possibility of historical progress at all, seemed to be without substance. The failure of a proletarian revolution to occur in the developed capitalist societies, the subjugation of workers' organizations to a consolidated and expanding fascism, the manipulative power of monopolistic mass society in the West and of state socialism on the Stalinist model in the East – all these political experiences lent impetus to the transition from the Critical Theory of the 1930s to the critique of instrumental reason during the 1940s, a critique which became at the same time theoretically more radical and practically more conservative.' Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, 'Editors' Afterword: The Position of "Dialectic of Enlightenment" in the Development of Critical Theory' in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* (Trans. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002, p.228.

101

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Diskussionen über die Differenz zwischen Positivismus und materialistischer Dialektik", in Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol.12* ,p.443.·Quoted in Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, 'Editors' Afterword: The Position of "Dialectic of Enlightenment" in the Development of Critical Theory' in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* op. cit., p.230.

102

See Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976, pp.92-103.

103

Theodor Adorno 'Theses on Need' (1942), (Trans. Keston Sutherland), *Quid*, No.16, pp.40–44.

104

Sander, 'The Past Devours the Future: Piketty's Capital', *Mute,* February 2015, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/past-devours-future-pikettys-capital

105

Toscano, 'Notes on Late Fascism', op. cit.

106

'Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite.' Theodor Adorno, 'Finale', *Minima Moralia*, op. cit., p.147.

Arguments

Stirner, Marx and the Unreal Totality

Andrei Chitu

This text juxtaposes Max Stirner's attempt to free the 'I' from all determination with what at first seems to present an opposing position – Theodor Adorno's quasi-ontologising of the capitalist system of constraints. These are for Chitu two positions that each fall into producing ahistorical forms of totalisation, which instead need to be thought dialetically. Marx's critique of Stirner in the *German Ideology* provides, for Chitu, some clues of how it might be done.

One of the lessons of this text is that the reader should never ask philosophers the question 'what is to be done?', or absorb their answers without any scepticism. Even though this unasked for piece of advice is useless, since philosophers tend to answer questions they've never been asked anyway, it is worthwhile I believe to still ask, why? The short answer is that some philosophers or critical theorists have a propensity for theoretical exaggeration. In step with the times this text will try to enforce conceptual austerity on some forms of theoretical overreach.

Even though this text does not deal directly with the concept of 'real subsumption' as it is presented in this volume, its proximity will hopefully become apparent if one understands perspectives which assert the capitalist subsumption of subjectivity and social reality as equally guilty of the theoretical overreach just mentioned.

Nevertheless since the formulation (by Nikolai Chernyshevsky) of the question 'what is to be done?' and especially since the faltering of the political project Lenin began, one cannot but notice an increasingly strident tone of despair, that makes the question more rhetorical and less practical. Despair, as most popular psychologists will underline, entails some form of overreaction. While not negating the reality of 'true despair', this is certainly plausible in the case here under discussion. It is quite imaginable to understand this overreaction as a 'trickle down' effect of theoretical exaggeration. After all, as psychoanalysts would say, trauma is not to be located in the event itself, but in its *Aufarbeitung,* in its *coming to terms with the event.*

In dealing with a history that has indeed not been kind to the aspirations of leftist struggles, one might tend to inflate the victorious opponent in order to offer some form of therapeutical reassurance, that it couldn't have been done anyways. In the case presented here, the inflation of the opponent means overstretching the term capitalism, generating certain crude understandings of real subsumption which this book tries to criticise. Capitalism then would no longer define a particular, finite, historical

formation but would take an ontological or theological turn that sees it as an understanding of being that permeates every aspect of modern or contemporary life, precludes the possibility of coherent critique and renders forms of resistance illusory and futile. This is the exaggeration that is to be unpacked in the following. It will take three steps. Starting from the trivial supposition that in the capitalist social formation a subject understands itself as a free agent circumscribed by objective naturalised social conditions, I will look at Marx's critique of Max Stirner as a template in dealing with a first exaggeration regarding the impotence of society against the expansive powers of individual subjectivity. Marx shows not only that individuality is not as free-floating and immediately self-creative as Stirner believes, but also that a position like Stirner's is quite common as a result of subjectivity being anchored in the machinations of the social world. The second step will try to show, by way of Hans-Jürgen Krahl's critique of Theodor W. Adorno, how this Marxian critique of Stirner can become just a reversal of Stirner, repeating some of the same mistakes, simply by exaggerating the objective naturalised conditions against a now epiphenomenally free subjectivity, the domination of the social formation of the individual is perceived as 'total'. As an answer to the first two problems, in the third step I'll sketch a notion of relative autonomy via some issues in Moishe Postone's work.

Spectres of Stirner

As already mentioned, the topics that we are dealing with originate, even if not in their most elaborate form, in the works of Marx himself, specifically in his discussion of Stirner in the *German Ideology*. Many of the features brought together under the concept of *false consciousness* are discussed in this text. Against its seeming pervasiveness today, the ontologisation of capital is the reaction. I call here false conciousness various positions that repeat a broadly Stirnerian understanding of the relation of the I to the (historical) world. The argument to be made in the following is that by trying to dissipate the various spectres of

Stirner that seem to loom large over contemporary consciousness, one unsuspectingly repeats some of the same mistakes that Marx finds Stirner guilty of, and this is achieved by assuming the apparently opposite position.

This discussion of Stirner has found various echoes in the history of Marxism. Nonetheless some consensus seems to exist regarding what the critique of Stirner in *The German Ideology* is about. *Prima faciae* it seems to be a critique of the petite bourgeois notion of alienation, of its limited view of what freedom can mean and of the various particular aspirations of individual bourgeois subjects. It certainly is all this, though I believe one can extract a little more from Marx's critique. In order to accomplish this we need to look at what it is exactly Stirner engages with, and what he understands by *critique.*

What Stirner finds repulsive is the heteronomic nature of intentional activity guided by principles, causes, ideas that hold at least some degree of generality. But letting yourself be guided by general ideas you surrender autonomy to external determinations that rule over your biography. This is not in itself something that a Marxist would *immediately* disagree with. What can become rather contentious is, of course, the *nature* of the generality that impedes individual autonomy. Superficially, both Stirner and Marx agree that behind the general and abstract notions, like for example 'mankind', metaphysical *Spitzfindigkeiten* (subtleties) are more often than not creeping in. Universal 'mankind' may just as well be but a particular theological representation. The difference between Marx and Stirner, which will show itself to be fundamental, is, in the first instance, not one of *what* but of *how*. Stirner sees all general notions as competing illusions trying to posses and arrest an *I,* thus roadblocking its quest towards self-discovery. The problem that Marx has with this notion of self-discovery is that it remains underdetermined. It is not the result of a historical situation in which an individual finds herself. It is also not the result of any form of content that can be deemed external to the autonomous life of the mind:

> Stirner regards the various stages of life only as 'self-discoveries' of the individual, and these 'self-discoveries' are moreover always reduced to a definite relation of consciousness. Thus the variety of *consciousness* is here the life of the individual. The physical and social changes which take place in the individuals and produce an altered consciousness are, of course, of no concern to Stirner. In Stirner's work, therefore, child, youth and man always find the world ready-made, just as they merely 'find' 'themselves'; absolutely nothing is done to ensure that there should be something which can in fact be found.[1]

What populates the ready-made world are greedy illusions, God, the Emperor or Mankind. All these are thought of as particulars that follow their own interest, which is to subdue individuals and arrest their development. In other words, Stirner *makes it personal*. He sees institutions or abstract ideas as quasi-anthropomorphic alter-egos, as more or less analogous to conscious individuals, against whom the Stirnerian *I* engages in a battle of the will:

> Further, the man who, as a youth, stuffed his head with all kinds of nonsense about existing powers and relations such as the Emperor, the Fatherland, the state, etc., and knew them only as his own 'delirious fantasies', in the form of his conceptions – this man, *according to Saint Max, actually destroys all these powers* by getting out of his head his false opinion of them. On the contrary: now that he no longer looks at the world through the spectacles of his fantasy, he has to think of the practical interrelations of the world, to get to know them and to act in accordance with them. By destroying the *fantastic* corporeality which the world had for him, he finds its real corporeality outside his fantasy. With the disappearance of the *spectral corporeality* of the Emperor, what disappears for him is not the corporeality, but the *spectral character*

> of the Emperor, the actual power of whom he can now at last appreciate in all its scope.[2]

Unveiling the spectral notions that envelope and legitimate the powers that exert influence on the mind of the youth could be a chance to confront their facticity and inspect their function. But Stirner chooses instead what Marx deems bad metaphysics. It is a metaphysics that negates the reality of abstraction. Marx makes here the quite obvious point that the power of the ghosts that possess one's mind cannot be dispelled just by a *reorientation of thinking* and that the efficiency of abstract ideas and universal causes transcends our belief in them. I may believe that the Emperor lacks a divine right to rule, but I still can be mobilised and sent to war to die in his name. To put it emphatically, for Marx, ghosts are real.

It is telling (to Marx) that for Stirner the understanding of generality as (epistemic) illusion corresponds to a *flattening* of the (social) ontology on one end and a creative nothing, a productive ineffability, the substance of selfhood, at the other. The *I* discovers itself by dispelling the illusions that it creates for itself. The content of these illusions (the social ontology) doesn't seem to have any relation to the life of the *I.* The *I* is not an object for it.

But the bonds that tie my *I* to the world are tighter than Stirner would like them to be. What Marx seems to be aiming at in his critique of Stirner is that there are external 'objective' determinations that precede and circumscribe the space in which Stirner's *I* moves. This takes the form of showing that the presumably unobjectifiable activity that is Stirner's *I* is embedded in the same structure as the mind-flaying ghost of the Emperor. This structure is given by the categories themselves that are the knots that tie individual experience and social existence:

> The youth as a man does not even react critically towards ideas which are valid also for others and are current as categories, but is critical only of those ideas that are the 'mere

> offspring of his brain', i.e., general concepts about existing conditions reproduced in his brain. Thus, for example, he does not even resolve the *category* 'Fatherland', but only his personal opinion of this category, after which the *generally valid* category still remains, and even in the sphere of 'philosophical thought' the work is only just beginning. He wants, however, to make us believe that he has destroyed the category itself because he has destroyed his emotional personal relation to it – exactly as he has wanted to make us believe that he has destroyed the power of the Emperor by giving up his fantastic conception of the Emperor.[3]

Again, affirmation of one's individuality and the evaluation of one's conscious life as that which *makes a* difference, can only happen if one does away with the implicit content to be found in the categories that one encounters. If the *I* considers them in their content one has to admit a social structure that binds meaning to words. If the *I* tries to extricate itself from this structure that is indeed the structure of its heteronomy, one finds indeed nothing, as Stirner himself notes. The strategy of Marx is to demonstrate that this nothing that Stirner takes the *I* to be is not creative and ineffable but an abstract wasteland. By showing that one cannot then recreate herself and one's own world by no longer believing in the bonds that tie oneself to God, Emperor and mankind, Marx hints at the idea that freedom, or autonomy, is a social project. If Stirner affirmed the freedom of the *I* at the expense of the efficient existence of an 'external' world then Marx would have, in a sense, to do the opposite. To explain the reality of the external determinations at the expense of the freedom of the individual self.

In order to do this, one can concentrate on Stirner's discussion of the *I* to show that it is lacking in the possibility of the very freedom that it takes as a presupposition:

> Since Saint Max pays no attention to the physical and social 'life' of the individual, and says nothing at all about

> 'life', he quite consistently abstracts from historical epochs, nationalities, classes, etc., or, which is the *same thing,* he inflates the *consciousness* predominant in the class nearest to him in his immediate environment into the normal consciousness of 'a man's life'. In order to rise above this local and pedantic narrow-mindedness he has only to confront 'his' youth with the first young clerk he encounters, a young English factory worker or young Yankee, not to mention the young Kirghiz-Kazakhs.[4]

To rise above means to compare specificities, historical situations, social determinations, in short to engage in the relation between forms of content. It means to deal with the topic of negation, or more precisely with negation's relation to content. Stirner doesn't see that negation is a two way street that determines both what negates and that which is negated. He negates, in Hegel's terms, *abstractly,* as he understands negation as erasure of content and not as determination, thus failing to ensure that 'there should be something which can in fact be found'[5]. Negating the ready-made world *determinately* implies negation of oneself as a complete part of that which is negated. Thinking about oneself as an individual outside of relations of dependency with the world and thinking about the world as given ready-made are thoughts that determine each other, as they share a common denial of historicity. Historicity does not only mean the possibility of changing the environment and the self but it also implies the habitation of an already structured reality that is the result of previous activity. The problem of divorcing consciousness from content leaves thought helpless in front of its own historicity, of its own unscrutinised assumptions. In a sense one can say that historicity *is* the lack of self-transparency of thought. But if one posits the realisation of individual egoism, the constitution of autonomy qua uniqueness by negating all content, one not only personalises history but also transforms it into a ghost-story:

> We spoke above of the German philosophical conception of history. Here, in Saint Max, we find a brilliant example of it. The speculative idea, the abstract conception, is made the driving force of history, and history is thereby turned into the mere history of philosophy. But even the latter is not conceived as, according to existing sources, it actually took place – not to mention how it evolved under the influence of real historical relations – but as it was understood and described by recent German philosophers, in particular Hegel and Feuerbach. And from these descriptions again only that was selected which could be adapted to the given end, and which came into the hands of our Saint by tradition. Thus, history becomes a mere history of illusory ideas, a history of spirits and ghosts, while the real, empirical history that forms the basis of this ghostly history is only utilised to provide bodies for these ghosts; from it are borrowed the names required to clothe these ghosts with the appearance of reality. In making this experiment our Saint frequently forgets his role and writes an undisguised ghost-story.[6]

To recapitulate, what is for Marx of interest in this exposition, is the question of the origin of the *content* that the Stirnerian consciousness, freed from heteronomous determination believes it self-generates, i.e. the question of the origin of a fundamentally ahistorical view of subjectivity. In order to legitimise the reality of the proposed egoism, Stirner needs to subtract individual consciousness from any form of determination that might be present in the social life of the individual, leaving aside the question of the causes or contents of the self-discoveries. Marx suggests, in a deeply Hegelian vein, that such a theory of an indeterminate (and thus abstract) individuality is profoundly permeable in its relation to the world and to itself through the concrete reality of the author for which it lacks means of mediation. The adoption of such a view, condemns the Stirnerian egoist to dependency on it's own situation whose ready-made answers and dispositions will be

adopted under the form of free choice. This illusion of freedom and self-possession is a historically determined form of naivety, specific according to Marx to the educated bourgeoisie. This is betrayed by the fundamentally idealistic tendency of reducing the concept of ideology to that of epistemic illusion or to understand history as only analogous to the biography of the individual human being, as a process of freeing oneself from illusions.

Supposing every form of historical thinking shatters in front of the assertion that individual experiences are incomparable with each other. While this is abstractly true, we all inhabit a social reality which constantly objectifies individual experience and compares its value. It is also Stirner's critique of communism, therefore needs to efface uniqueness for equality to take hold. The incomparability of experience is a result of historical struggle and cannot be already presupposed as a given. It certainly seems that at the heart of the discussion lies the notion of alienation that is quite difficult to tackle immediately. There are of course many areas where authors like Stirner or Marx concur. The task of critique is not to show the Good, but to show the seeds of discord. We can stylise two kinds of critique that are presented head to head in Marx's critique of Stirner. By highlighting their fundamental difference I hope to shed light on the systematic issues that are silently humming in the background silenced by the polemical tone of the text.

If we take Marx and Stirner to be representatives of the two traditions of critique (of which they are of course not the sole representatives), one can formulate the following hypothesis. One can either hold the individual lived experience, its 'mineness', *Jemeinigkeit* as Heidegger would put it, as the standpoint and measure of critique, or it should possess a more encompassing and ubiquitous notion of alienation, that understands individual experience as being part of a whole and subject to determinations that are not fully under the control of individual will. If we see Stirner as a champion of the former, Marx espouses the latter.

Another general remark that can be made refers to the notion of the concrete, that is also a marker of difference between these two models of understanding critique. In this sense one can assume that the overheated polemical tone of Marx is but a symptom of a deep incompatibility between the two projects, despite some points of convergence in their attacks on conservative tropes.

If, for Stirner one should start from the assertion that experience is first and foremost mine it is constantly subverted by forces that seek to detour the road to self-assertion and subdue, domesticate and package the individual in determinations that strip away, or at least hide, the uniqueness of individual experience. Thus for Stirner it seems that the confrontation at the heart of existence that defines social life is one between autonomy and heteronomy, the former meaning the unique individualising property of an ineffable self and the latter its captivity in the prisons of language, religion, politics and morals. Ideology for Stirner is a set of belief or attitudes that impede self-realisation, the expression of *mineness*. Basically, for Stirner ideology is false, a measure of distance from the unique.

In Marx's case, ideology reflects the way in which determinations of the social totality in which the individual is embedded act upon its historical self-understanding. Contrary to Stirner there is no escaping them by way of simple introspection, as this introspection itself is guided, roadblocked, if not even constituted by the efficiency of these categories for the manifest self-understanding of the individual. Thus *mineness* itself is a historical notion and historically mediated form of interpreted experience.

Indeed, Stirner himself criticises the uncritical acceptance of a ready-made, immediately given reality. Where the two authors part ways is the way this attack on the naive acceptance of reality and the reason why it is pursued.

Stirner is caught between the Scylla of having to accept that there are determinations that precede and act upon my understanding of freedom thus limiting the scope of my own creation/discovery, thus ensuring that the Ego has some sort of content

that would prove its concreteness and the Charibdys of boundless freedom which means letting go of any pretense of concreteness. This is broadly the critique that Marx raises. This inconsistency of Stirner that Marx uncovers and its unwillingness to decide is not particular to the discussed author but as Marx points out, a symptom rooted in modern subjectivity itself.

An Obituary

If Stirner starts from the standpoint of 'mineness', the opposite standpoint would be to start from some impersonal structure, like capitalism. This is to say that the *I* is no longer owned by the heteronomous causes of god and mankind but by the social mediation that keeps them together. This social mediation is the opacity of myself, not the illusions that I confront. It is a lack of transparency that can manifest itself, in the case of Stirner, in attributing intentionality to abstract entities or ideas.

The risk in this manoeuvre is, of course, repeating Stirner in reverse. In conceding to the mediation and the structure it construes the attribute that Stirner gave to his *I*: autonomy. As in the case of Stirner this autonomy is won by becoming indifferent towards the various ideas or institutions that want to own me, in this case the totality of mediation becomes autonomous by becoming indifferent towards the entities that it mediates. It becomes a real *thing*. This is the overreaction that I mentioned in the beginning. This is best described in the obituary that Hans-Jürgen Krahl wrote at the death of his Professor, Theodor Adorno. The text 'Der politische Widerspruch der Kritischen Theorie Adornos', published by Hans-Jurgen Krahl shortly after his Professors' death, operates more or less as a critique of intellectual passivity of a fundamentally bourgeois academic, one grounded historically and philosophically in a defense of modernity and civilisation that are, pace Krahl, fundamentally corrupt as well.[7] Nevertheless he makes two crucial points. First that a negation without compromise is for Adorno a negation that presupposes a 'closed system'. Based on the experience of the Nazi terror it unmasks the

underlying assumptions of industrial class society and confronts its ideals with its facticity. But his negation of *everything* in capitalism is not an radical one, it still has a limit, that is capitalism as such.[8] His methodological monism, the presupposition of capitalism as a closed system, admits the theoretical force of Adorno's thinking, but positions the author in a political no man's land, a person who never returned from exile.[9] Moreover, this position of perpetual emigré, is guilty of a neutrality that can quickly lead to a circumspect view of any sort of protesting solidarity, as being covered by the dictum: 'The afterlife of National Socialism in democracy is potentially more dangerous than the afterlife of fascistic tendencies against democracy.'[10] That which gives explanatory power, gives also a permanent anguish for any form of resistance as it is never sufficiently negative enough. The second theoretical point that Krahl raises, also refers to the issue of negation, though this time in its relation to history. Negation, in order to surpass the abstraction of the concept needs to take sides, to determine itself. This determination, the taking of sides, the engagement in a struggle is its objectivity.[11] Krahl sees the impossibility for Adorno in taking sides in the struggles with which he was surrounded at the time not only as a form of private abstinence from politics, but as being rooted in the diagnosis of society that he shared with other Frankfurt authors like Horkheimer or Friedrich Pollock. Their shared presuppositions, that the working class has been completely integrated in the post-war capitalist society and thus historical materialist dialectics came to its unnatural end as the vehicle that should have thrusted it forward seemed unable to live up to the task. This integration of the proletariat pushes Adorno in his later work to come dangerously close to the 'ahistorical concept of history', a concept that he himself ascribes to Heidegger.[12] One of the targets of Krahl's critique of Adorno was the latter's conviction that proletarian existence was fully integrated in the postwar welfare state. If, for Krahl, the problem of Adorno is in a sense that of giving up without even trying and finds its grounds in an uncritical self-examination, the roots of this might lie a bit deeper.

As mentioned above, Adorno shared this thesis with his fellow Frankfurt theorist Max Horkheimer. In his seminal *Time, Labor and Social Domination,* Moishe Postone takes issue with the underlying presupposition, that, in his view, underlies many assumptions of the Frankfurt School brand of critical theory. Postone believes that Horkheimer's (as well as Adorno's) pessimism is grounded in the seemingly successful abolition of class antagonism through New Deal policies, National Socialist *Gleichschaltung* (forced standardisation) and Soviet Stalinism. All three represent shapes of postliberal capitalism, of capitalism without the free market, new forms of social totality that function without an intrinsic structural contradiction and so do not expose a historical dynamic that might abolish them. This pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno is, for Postone, not only grounded in the witnessed horrors of the 20th century but also a conceptual necessity resulting from a lack of theoretical self-reflection.[13]

This lack of theoretical self-reflection is manifest, pace Postone, in a notion of totality that is no longer shaped by antagonisms or contradiction. The seeming complacency of the working class suggested to the Frankfurt authors not only that there is no longer a subject that can push history forward but that one deals in this age with a notion of totality much more monotonous in its structure that no longer leaves room for historical or political agency, as there are no longer sides to pick or consciousness to be developed. The totality becomes in a sense synonymous with being. This is as we mentioned previously an overreaction.

Postulating a social totality that functions without a structural contradiction is to postulate it as just given, as ready-made, not unlike Stirner as we have seen. But if, in the case of Stirner, the ready-made world was a slave to the whims of the *I*, in the case of the Frankfurt authors the reversal I mentioned takes place, as it seems that the *I* itself is a ready-made element at the whims of a history that becomes opaque. Opaque, because to suppose such a thing – the absence of internal contradictions in a historical social formation – amounts to a need to explain historical change

through exogenous causes. Causes that need to be found outside the object of critique, rendering it transcendent.

Moreover, the Marxian theory, according to this approach, is self-reflexive and, hence, is itself historically specific: its analysis of the relation of theory and society is such that it can, in an epistemologically consistent manner, locate itself historically by means of the same categories with which it analyzes its social context.[14]

Immanent critique for Postone has thus to formulate the specificity of its object, of the historical social context in which the critique itself arises. Thus immanent critique presupposes a methodological holism, by positing a social totality and then crucially, for Postone, opposes it to previous historical forms. For him, Marxist critique is a critique of labour in modernity, not a critique from the standpoint of labour, as he puts it. What distinguishes capitalist labour from just labour as such is its irreducible social character. This irreducible social character of labour may be lost, if one understands labour as an ontological fact of human interaction with nature. For example, for Postone, the critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour starts from the reality of exploitation. Criticising the exploitation of labour misses the point for him as there is no such thing as non-exploitive labour. Harsh conditions or the pointlessness of the activity are results of the capitalist form of alienation – exploitation is a consequence of the social character of labor in capitalism and thus does not grasp the specificity of capitalism itself. It only thematises the mode of distribution, not its essence.

It is significant I believe to link Krahl's complaint about the anti-authoritarian movement with Postone's description of the specific self-understanding of the modern subject, as a free subject embedded in a system of constraints that appear as quasi-natural. This is contrasted in Postone with other previous forms of social domination that rest on personal dependency. Looking again at the quotes from the *German Ideology* it becomes clear that Stirner understands domination in a way reminiscent of this premodern, precapitalist sense of personal domination. As we have seen,

Stirner needs to to *personalise* the domination of concepts like God, Mankind or Justice, to make them into images of himself (to *Egos*) in order to explain their power over the *I*'s mind. In order to save the free subject he has to deny the real existence of the system of constraints that envelops her. What Marx sees is the obvious particularity of Stirner's position. If he can do away with the personal dominion of abstract notions by simply changing his thinking, it is simply because he is personally dominated in a quite different way than a serf, for example. Herein consists the illusionary character of Stirner's position. A unilateral formulation based on a particular position. We can then understand the second part of the essay by looking at Adorno's pessimism as a sort of overreaction to Stirner. If Stirner abolishes or deems unreal the quasi-natural objectivity in order to affirm free subjectivity by sheer brain power, Adorno deems unreal the free subjectivity by quasi-ontologising the capitalist system of constraints. These two positions that complement each other need to be thought in their dialectical mediation.

Fulfilling Unreality

Only by positing the question of the mediation of these two positions, can we evade the theoretical attitude of 'why it is not possible'. Formulating the question of the possibility of critique or revolutionary practice already implies a skepticism about them. More precisely, the question itself always leads one in such a way as to show that there is no possibility of deducing critical distance from the capitalist totality in which critique originates. One has instead to start, I believe, not from the question of the possibility of critique but from the articulation of capitalism as a finite social formation.[15] If one starts from the assumption that capitalism is finite not only in a vulgar ontological sense (in space and time) but logically (in a Hegelian sense), it is not only that critical knowledge is possible *in* capitalism (the diachronic aspect) but also critical knowledge is, in a certain sense its negativity (the synchronic aspect). Then, the reconstruction of social totality in thought as the

synchronicity of implications happens against the background of its historical diachronicity. I believe that the only way to mediate them is to say that both (the totality and the historical succession of moments) are in a sense posited by the other, that they are 'unreal' for themselves, if you want. The question is then, to put it in its proper dialectical formulation, not if there is a moment or a dimension of human activity that is not subsumed by the process of valorisation, not if there is some space lacking in determination outside of capitalist logic, but what might define a *relative* autonomy of the individual from the structure in which she is embedded. This relative autonomy is, I believe, exactly the posited 'unreal' character of the synchronous and diachronous aspects of the dialectic. This means that we should formulate the two sides of the unreal. First, the irreality of the moment from the perspective of the structure, the structure being this irreality of the moment, and secondly the irreality of the structure, which is the reality of the moment. Therefore I believe that the correct way to engage theoretically with the question of surpassing our historical moment is to neither ontologise the individual nor the structure. I believe that some traditions of the left do the former. Recall, in this text, of the apparition of Stirnerian spectres. While some, like the (Postonian) *Wertkritik* (value criticism) do the latter. Both are in my eyes guilty of falling into the trap of metaphysical *subtleties,* of regarding 'foundations' or 'standpoints' affirmatively. Less abstractly, the relative autonomy of the individual with regard to structure consists in the fact that at no given time are all the moments of the totality given, so in a certain sense the social totality is never fully present. This is its incoherence, its irreality. Therefore the autonomy of the individual is a relative temporal one, resulting from the incoherence of the totality.[16] This incoherence of totality through time is the real possibility of political struggles, as they necessarily presuppose a relative autonomy of the individuals taking part in them.

The purpose of revolutionary practice is not to (only) negate this capitalist totality but to sublate it, which means the fulfillment of its irreality.

1
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology,* Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998, p.140.

2
Ibid., p.137.

3
Ibid., p.137.

4
Ibid., p.140.

5
Ibid., p.140.

6
Ibid., p.142.

7
In Hans-Jurgen Krahl, *Konstitution und Klassenkampf. Zur historischen Dialektik von bürgerlicher Emanzipation und proletarischer Revolution. Schriften und Reden 1966–1970*, Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, 1971, pp.291–294. Originally published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 13 October, 1969, first translated in English as 'The Political Contradiction in Adorno's Critical Theory', *Telos,* Autumn, 1974, No.21 pp.164-167.

8
Ibid.

9
Ibid.

10
'[...] das Nachleben des Nationalsozialismus in der Demokratie als potentiell bedrohlicher denn das Nachleben faschistischer Tendenzen gegen die Demokratie.' Ibid.

11
Ibid., p.292.

12
Ibid., p.294.

13
Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press (1993), p.85. I doubt that Postone portrays accurately the position of Horkheimer, as I believe that the latter thoroughly holds that all capitalist social formations are structurally contradictory, though he denies that this contradiction entails a necessary historical dynamic. Although I believe this position to also be quite problematic I will leave it for another occasion.

14
Ibid., p.5.

15
This is more or less what Postone does.

16
I believe that any other way of looking at the concept of autonomy, that doesn't explicate it as both temporal and relative, is *theological.*

Arguments

Procedures of Abolition and Several Paradoxes They Throw Up

Marina Vishmidt

This essay was originally presented at the workshop in Bilbao in 2014 and was further developed for this publication. The text juxtaposes differing understandings of abolition from the perspectives of gender abolitionism and Afropessimism with the Marxist abolition of the proletariat. Vishmidt, following Fred Moten, problematises the notion of real subsumption from the perspective of the slave. In doing so the text poses original challenges to what Ray Brassier has framed as the 'paradox of self-abolition'.

In what follows, I would like to look at how ideas around abolition and self-abolition can help us understand the processes of dissolution and constitution implied by a revolutionary transformation of social relations, on the individual as well as collective level. Here, 'abolition' is a perspective applying chiefly to the abolition of 'women' or the abolition of gender. With regard to other determinations, such as race, however, it also needs to be thought together with the calls for 'destroying the world' that emerge from the thinking that gets called 'Afropessimism', or, more cogently, the emergence of political ontologies around the histories and critiques of anti-blackness. Both can thus be connected to varieties of philosophical negativity in the Western tradition, of which the two most prominent are the dialectical one (negation as transformation) of Hegel and ontological difference in Heidegger. Insofar as the abolition of gender is set out as the abolition of the institutionalised oppression which is the content of the gender relation, it can be aligned with the Hegelian framework, whereas the destruction of the horizon of being as predicated on anti-blackness is the Heideggerian move set on the purported ontological difference of the 'black' from the 'human' in the Western (and not just Western) social and ethical imagination. But further, some of the thinking I will be discussing below, such as Monique Wittig and Fred Moten, cannot easily be located on either side, as both develop a commitment to 'entanglement' as the condition of any rupture, be it in terms of the subject as a device for jettisoning subjectivity (also a theme in the Hegelian-influenced thinking of Theodor W. Adorno) or in terms of an aesthetics of being-together in nothingness as the condition of black social life.

In all the iterations of abolition I would like to discuss, the notion of self-abolition applies to a *collective* subject, or a subject that becomes collective in the process of its abolition. Hence abolition should be taken strictly in terms of a *regulative principle* orienting the 'ruthless struggle' against ourselves as we are constituted in the present, with a view towards a goal of large-scale social transformation as a dynamic or cumulative goal of these

abolitionary processes. In this sense, self-abolition is both similar to and distinct from the traditional Marxist emphasis on the working class's abolition of itself via its own activity. The notion of 'abolition' these days most often occurs in left or libertarian communist theory. This is a viewpoint which is principally (if not universally in practice) opposed to the organs of mediation or representation, such as political parties, that the historical movement guided by the axiom of self-abolition did not in principle exclude. Rather, the notion of self-abolition in this thinking marks and engraves the rejection of mediation insofar as mediation is thought to consolidate rather than overcome the position of classes and other collective subjects on the losing side of capital as social relation. The regulative principle can also be directed outwards – think of the passage in a recently translated text by some late 1970s Milanese feminist groups 'destroy the bosses that are in you, destroy the capitalistic characteristics within you. destroy yourselves as our bosses, destroy yourselves as the inexhaustible vacuums of our domestic labour'.[1] It is addressed foremost to male comrades, that is, to those who already recognise the necessity of broad social transformation, though not, perhaps, its parameters as being coextensive with the whole of the social field, including its most privatised and naturalised spaces: the home and personal relationships. Those who would be free need to consider whose subjugation their freedom presupposes; as Pierre Macherey trenchantly notes in a recent text, 'most juridical relationships […] conceal a relationship which is not itself juridical'.[2] This is an insight that has been increasingly central to feminist and black radical discourse since the late 1970s, from Carol Pateman to Angela Mitropoulos to Fred Moten to Hannah Black, often also encapsulated in Simone Weil's famous phrase 'don't believe you have any rights'.

First, however, I'd like to spell out the problematic of the subject of self-abolition as it figures as a radical appropriation of a subjugated structural position, that sees that position as both a lever to challenge the existing system of domination and as part

of what has to be overcome within that structure – a question rather than a position and one which takes in elements of the psychic, the subjective, and the historical. I have found the problematic of self-abolition to be a productive way of joining the affirmative and negative moments of any radical emancipatory movement, be it class, gender, race or other hierarchical and naturalised forms of exploitation and control. The analytic of self-abolition also offers a flexible level of abstraction which can both contextualise and interrogate the positing of any social antagonism or difference as primary – an argument from fundamentality which occurs in many radical social movements. Ultimately, it proposes a concrete emancipation to the whole where that oppression is reproduced – it in effect proposes another universality from below, a fissure or a friction in the operation of universality itself. At the same time, the constitution of the collective self which undertakes abolition as a political project of determinate negation remains open to question, since the radical gesture of universality implicit in a liberation struggle can also reproduce the 'bad universalities' of homogeneity and ahistorical community that underpin the oppressive social order itself. To account for a self-abolishing subject of struggle, then, means both formulating a subject which cannot be valorised or affirmed beyond the particular historical instances of those struggles, and an agency which drives this struggle that is not somehow already implicit within the social order to be countered or removed – an agency which may be seen as an activated negativity.

A few examples can be derived from the work of theorist and poet Fred Moten, as well as, in this particular exploration, the 1970s and 80s materialist feminist theorist and writer Monique Wittig and Maya Gonzalez, who is also part of the Endnotes collective. They each have different formulations of abolition, or different approaches to this regulative principle if not explicitly naming it in those terms. These are based in strands of revolutionary theory that reckon with the racialised and gendered implications of the nominally abstract subject of 'the political'. For Monique Wittig, abolition is decisively class-based – she names

women as a class, and the hetero-patriarchal gender relation that creates 'women' as object and subjected as analogous to the class relation. The struggle of the class of women passes through a transitional point – through the 'individual', a type of subject that 'women' must pass through, which is to say, strategically affirm as a category of struggle, because they have been historically and normatively deprived of subjectivity by the gender relation. For Fred Moten, aesthetic experience can produce unknown worlds from the place of (racialised) nothingness that a history of commodification and oppression has generated, and this is the substance of the 'black radical tradition', social innovation and resistance arising from the site of 'social death'. Here abolition is figured as emancipatory but not organised, and it happens through the self- activity of a racialised subject which has never been a subject, or, has always been abolished (by capital and the colonial legal apparatus). For Maya Gonzalez, gender is akin to value – it is a social form separating people not so much from their humanity as from their *mutability* as social beings. Real abstractions such as gender (or, better, the patriarchal duality of men and women), value and labour are the blocks placed upon this human capacity of openness, re-shaping itself under historical conditions only partially of its own choosing. Marx's concept of 'species-being', equivocal and liable to essentialising, humanist affirmations though it might be, seems at least relevant here, albeit, as Lonzi and many other feminists of sexual difference would argue, this is a 'species' conceived implicitly according to a male model and in patriarchal times, e.g. 'Marxism has ignored women, both as oppressed people and as bearers of the future. Its revolutionary theory was developed within the framework of a patriarchal culture.'[3] Unlike Wittig, Gonzalez seeks a 'structural' explanation for why gender should be abolished, and it is similar to communisation theory has for the class relation: capital no longer needs 'women' as women, just like capital no longer needs 'workers' per se. This can be connected to the obsolete but lethal factuality Endnotes attempt to capture in the horrifying, yet intimate connotations

encoded in 'the abject'.[4] In other words, capital may still need people to occupy the position and perform the tasks associated with 'women', just like it needs people to work both to produce surplus-value and to uphold the work ethic as a club wielded over the heads of 'surplus' populations whose relation to this value is not one of exploitation but extraction, when not annihilation.

Abolition as a category of revolutionary theory and praxis however tries to sidestep the affirmation of any identity in any prior moment to the movement of abolition. Communisation theory is centrally premised on the undesirability of such affirmation. A political identity based on either the position of the woman or the working class is now untenable as the strategic affirmation of either of these social roles can have no emancipatory or transformative implications in the present, when it is no longer a question of being 'included' in the social contract but of overturning it (it may be clearer to say, to overturn it as part of a large-scale movement of social transformation, not in the way capital and the state are overturning it at present). Although Gonzalez suggests that the needs of class-based and gender-based struggles are incompatible with one another, given the historical relegation of women to social reproduction and the history of the workers' movement with regard to the 'woman question', self-abolition is still seen as the dynamic adequate to model the overcoming of both social forms. She sees self-abolition in explicit analogy with the class struggle: as the necessary consequence of self-organisation – with all its problems – as women and by women to overcome their situation as women. These 'problems' can be summarised, for the purposes of this text, in the term used elsewhere by Ray Brassier in his critique of Endnotes: 'the paradox of self-abolition', which consists of how a self conceived in purely negative terms, that is, defined by the capital relation through and through, is to find the resources to negate that relation, much less struggle for something else. For Ray Brassier, self-abolition can only escape its paradoxical status by means of rationality: choosing between good and bad mediations with the world as a process of emancipation

from the real abstractions of capital, guided by a self-legislating – or self-determined – rule, in a Kantian-Marxian reading of 'species-being'. This emerges as not merely a logical problem, but a material one. It attests to the fact that the horizon of transformation is always form-determined by the real abstractions to be transformed or done away with. Unless the problem of subjectivity, or, the politics of subjectivation, is addressed, the paradox remains all too concrete, as we have seen in every historical episode of insurrection, of revolution; even, more minimally, of any instance of self-organisation. This is the problem of subjectivity shaped and deformed by power, a vision of emancipation itself shaped by relations of power, if not in ideology, then in the experience of struggle against a powerful antagonist – no less than in the experience of ongoing unjust social relations themselves. (The question of violence is often posed at this point, albeit often quite abstractly.)

However, the question of subjectivity can be posed otherwise from the perspective of what Cedric Robinson and others have called 'the black radical tradition', and this also affects the idea of self-abolition, as we can see in the writing of Fred Moten. In his essay from several years ago, 'Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh', he talks about how the conceptual production of Afropessimism allows us 'to begin to consider *what nothing is*, not from its own standpoint or from any standpoint but from the absoluteness of its generative dispersion of a general antagonism that blackness holds and protects in as critical celebration and degenerative and regenerative preservation. [...] What's the relationship between blackness, thingliness, nothingness and the (de/re)generative operations of what Deleuze might call *a life* in common?' This is the proposition of subjectivation as a nothing, but arising from a dialectic between the historical conditions of expropriation from subjectivity, the collapse of variable and fixed capital in the historical experience of slavery and the socialising or socialisable dimension of an ongoing experience of social nothingness as a commonality, that is, as a general antagonism

– a nothingness as the basis of sociality. The implication here, it seems to me, is that the other side of lived real abstraction – the degree zero of not just having but being a commodity, of living as a negation of all that is deemed human and full of meaning – generates an experience of contingency which is predicated both in absolute negation as the baseline condition of existence, and the contingencies of experiencing this condition as shared, of transient affirmations and inhabitations. Moten writes that

> [t]he history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. Blackness – the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line – is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity. [...] My argument starts with the historical reality of commodities who spoke – of laborers who were commodities before, as it were, the abstraction of labor power from their bodies and who continue to pass on this material heritage across the divide that separates slavery and 'freedom'. But I am interested, finally, in the implications of the breaking of such speech, the elevating disruptions of the verbal that take the rich content of the object's/commodity's aurality outside the confines of meaning precisely by way of this material trace.[5]

The impossibility of integration is shown at the limit case – the racialised subject which never had subjectivity, yet has survived through and despite the basis of this antagonism, in a far from schematic way, an existence permeated not just by structural nothingness but by the physical annihilation, the violence this nothingness produces. It can and cannot be generalised as the impossibility of integration, of being valorised within the existing conditions of the reproduction of capital as we live it today. The mediations disappeared within the speaking commodity do not just include labour-power as such, but raced and gendered labour-power, and

the figure of the slave as the speaking commodity brings this into sharp relief. At the same time, the concept of real subsumption is challenged, in complicated ways, by the existence of the slave – who cannot be subsumed because they are already part of the machinery as it is constituted, they who are paradoxically outside the productive relations of capital because they are a precondition for them. Moten's conception can be read alongside Brassier's, vastly different as their apparatus of reference is, on the point that the constitution of social being as social death, while not outside capitalist social life and its form-determination of those processes that resist or seek to overcome it, partakes of nothingness as a structural constant rather than the illusionary fullness of capitalist mechanisms of social reproduction and thus starts out from a specific (determinate) place in the process of self-abolition. There is also a difference in the understanding of the emancipatory potential of spontaneity – for Brassier, it is related to a collectively self-determined rationality, while for Moten, it is music and language that illuminates the conditions of 'the general antagonism', disrupting the 'confines of meaning precisely by way of this material trace'. However, the two sets of propositions are closely engaged with the conditionalities of nothingness as the space of redefinition of what it is to think, have affect and live in common. Far from filling abolition with a positive epistemic or social content, this dwelling on nothingness seems rather to point to the lived experience of negativity as mediation with rather than cancellation of 'the world'.

Abolish, She Said

> At this point, let us say that a new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can only be found beyond the categories of sex (woman and man) and that the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals

> (practically all social sciences). [...] For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.[6]

The rationality of Marxist feminism here is seen as self-abolition, plain and simple. Yet, a number of mediations present themselves: class, individuals, sexuality, women, subjects, mediations with very complicated and obviously often unhelpful historical and political baggage. Wittig indicates the dialectics between individual and class in the movement of self-abolition. One must be attained, then abolished, then the next relational position attained, itself to be abolished, etc. All must be moved through, their potentials seized, their limits realised. With relation to Moten, 'to answer the question of the individual subject in materialist terms', Wittig does not want to linger in the hallucinatory, still unknown, mediations of nothingness; she is a good worker and wants to embark on the labour of the negative. Self-abolition is a long process, punctuated by the strategic affirmation of a number of ultimately undesirable identities, which are dialectically sloughed off: each is 'not-all' and thus does not complete a movement. We have already seen that the structure of gender abolition, here the 'abolition of women' in a unequal gender relation, explicitly models 'women' on the proletariat, situating them as the revolutionary subject. In Wittig, this is not metaphorical; women are immediately a class, an historical class formed in a class relation with men, exploited and exploiter. The self-abolition of women will be the elimination of women as a class in relation to men, and thus also the abolition of men. This echoes the work of Wittig's contemporary, Shulamith Firestone, in her concept of 'sex-class' as developed in *The Dialectic of Sex*. Wittig's famous position in relation

to this was that lesbians were not women because they are not subordinated to men, just as you can't have an exploited class of workers without an exploiter class of capitalists. The gender relation is strongly overdetermined by the dominant term, just like the capital relation.[7]

In accordance with this, although much more schematically, in this text, anyway, we listen to Maya Gonzalez, writing in 'Communization and the Abolition of Gender',

> In the course of struggle, women will, therefore, come into conflict with men. They will be criticized for derailing the movement, for diverting it from its primary goals. But the 'goal' of the struggle lies elsewhere. It is only from within this (and other) conflicts that the proletariat will come to see its class belonging as an external constraint, an impasse which it will have to overcome in order to be anything at all beyond its relation to capital. That overcoming is only the revolution as communization, which destroys gender and all the other divisions that come between us.[8]

The important point here is that unless self-abolition is extended to the overcoming of the gender relation, as it functions to reproduce capital and the relations between men and women, the self-abolition of the proletariat, under whatever conditions it takes place, will never pose an adequate resolution to the 'woman question' in its own right. While here stated as a series of axioms, Gonzalez's point is crucial with regard to the paradox of self-abolition as formulated by Brassier: those who are constituted by a relation cannot at the same time abolish that relation, also because they are constituted as particular subjects – or non-subjects, as we see with Moten – within that process, with very different relations to overcoming (the politics and ethics of gender are commonly overlooked by those who who want to 'smash capitalism'). Thus the self-abolition starts in

different places, depending on what is to be abolished. As we see for Wittig, certain things must be realised before being abolished, which to my mind opens up a lot of ambiguity, or, alternatively, space for further determination.

Ending Notes on Abolition

The virtue of the thought of abolition is that it sets its horizon decisively within the immanence of struggle. The structural analysis employed by the discourse of abolition is interested in determinate negation, that is, not an abstract and ideal dismissal of certain elements or structures of the present reality but in seeing what specific structural role those elements have in the reproduction of the total system we would want to change or leave behind. But there are still limitations to the concept no less than to the implied praxis of abolition. This chiefly has to do with the break between the determinacy of the analysis and the abstraction of the imperative 'to abolish'. One of the most salient of these abstractions is the so-called paradox of self-abolition, which has lately been opened up by Ray Brassier. The subject of abolition emerges through the struggle that abolition entails, yet it must also arrive at a point where the militant identity emerging through struggle has to eliminate its basis in the society that the movement wants to change or overcome. This is not a situation which can be dealt with by fiat, but has to be one of the modes and horizons of struggle itself, in which it will continue to unfold as a painful contradiction. Who is the subject that initiates and who comes out of the other side of self-abolition? The politics of abolition seem to be unable either to be done with, or even to really formulate, this 'paradox of subjectivity', which Brassier's text goes some way toward formulating, albeit opening itself up at times to critiques of formalism.

The problematic of abolition also stands within the question of mediation – what is to be abolished, and do the processes of abolition not necessarily partake of what they are setting out to abolish? Some abolition discourses, particularly in the debates

coming out of communisation and other 'ultra-left' currents, seem to slide into a kind of gnosticism, in their postulation of a wholesale cancellation of a fallen world – a tendency discussed elsewhere in this volume ('Feeding the Infant'). We can, in the most preliminary way here, note, with Hegel, that if the 'rational is the real and the real is the rational' this can only be so because to the degree the real did not take its present form accidentally but through an ongoing series of complex mediations, as part of the 'rationality' of capital in its reproduction, a historical logic that will not be arbitrarily or voluntaristically re-routed. The real can only negate it dialectically, preserving by cancelling, coming to find out what 'it' (the thing) really is in the collective process of overcoming. Why this idea has maybe become more recessed in the political thinking of the present is that there is nothing like a historical movement whose goal seems to be self-abolition: therefore, counter-intuitively, it is more than ever the only option. But this echoes the more hollowly, mournfully.

In the question posed by Brassier in his text – 'given the "ontological inversion" through which "material life" itself is now "animated" by capital, who or what are the agents of communisation?' – is the question of the hypothesis of real subsumption.[9] As such, it leaves us with a real and a false problem. The false problem first – the assumption of 'real subsumption' is that theoretical objects of experience called capital and life are now co-extensive, that so to speak everything is 'incorporated' is a vacuous premise, and a tautology. It eliminates space for analysis, for struggle, for real contradiction and the forms taken by those contradictions in reality – it is, in other words, a comfortable hypothesis, which is why it gets adopted as an easy form of radicalism in cultural scenes first and foremost. It is a contemplative type of idealism which forms the other face of the discourse of the commons and alternative economies that is the other strong vein of political interest running through contemporary art-activism milieus. As Brassier writes about real abstractions in his text,

> This logicisation of social reality explains why there can be a contradiction between what human beings think and do in relating to themselves, or what they think and do in reproducing capital. But this logicisation by the value-form is not absolute: it applies to human activities and practices only insofar as they constitute labour. These activities and practices persist within the capital relation as phenomena that it has incorporated but not wholly absorbed. They are not wholly absorbed because they constitute the process through which capital absorbs labour. Capital's self-reproduction is constituted by phenomena that it cannot reproduce, even as it reproduces the labour which in turn reproduces it. Thus capital's logicisation of reality is itself conditioned by that reality; this is the bulwark against absolute idealism, which would hypostatise capital as a wholly autonomous, self-moving subject (a *causa sui* or self-causing being) floating free of material reality altogether[10]

Thus, this extremely formalist and empty notion is shown to be nothing if not the positivisation, the affirmation, of social reality in terms of capital's 'total subsumption' of it, rather than staying with nothingness as a fleshly (Moten) or eliminative (Brassier) dimension of lived negativity. It also transfers its formalist absoluteness to the notion of abolition, which then runs the risk of sounding like world-cancelling abstraction rather than a historically mediated possibility.

But the real problem, and I will conclude here, which appears in the diagnosis of a 'paradox' – is that some communisation theory attempts to separate subjectivity and theory from struggles, while positing theory as the self-critical or reflexive moment of struggles. The first move is more questionable than the second – the terms in which self-criticism is posed are both the ethical and political milieu of any movement or struggle and that which emerge in the process of struggle themselves. Struggle is never its own answer, it is only ever a question. The question

is: why are struggles so rare? The inability of people to reproduce themselves within existing social relations of capital can have a mobilising effect. What it cannot do is prescribe the political direction such mobilisations can take, given the greater traction of reactionary viewpoints on both the Left and Right. The thinking of contingency can accentuate that of abolition, since the contingency of survival on capital's terms is brought home even more starkly in encounters with a state brutally trying to efface the fact of its own contingency through physical and legal violence. Self-abolition can be a deterministic formula which conflates strategy and ontology; on the other hand, it speaks to the necessity of eradicating the ground on which you stand as part of the transformation you desire. The risk of determinism stems from an illusory concreteness which is logical and schematic, rather than historical and mediated. The problematic here is one of circumscribing categories, but also what it means to keep history and logic, or, different levels of abstraction, apart. As Cinzia Arruzza suggests, we must be careful about tendencies to conflate levels of thought and practice which are related but non-identical, imagining this will politically ground our theoretical work:

> proving the logical necessity of gender oppression for capitalism arises from an understandable political concern, i.e., the worry that failing to demonstrate this logical dependence would mean that gender oppression is politically secondary to class politics. [...] I think that we should *reject* rather than answer this interpellation, given that it rests on a mistaken presupposition: the dynamics of political struggle cannot be directly deduced from theoretical observations at this level of abstraction.[11]

The paradox of abolition, then, is a paradox of abstraction translated into action. It tries to skate over subjectivity, but also temporality – the local and partial historical achievement of acquiring the universalising fiction of subjectivity. Thus the paradox of self-abolition is on the one hand, a logical one, but it is also affective and social.

A collective subject may be the substance and the motor of self-abolition, but once gained in struggle it is hard to dismantle, especially in an unremittingly hostile world. All the monsters of restoration, including its most 'abject' mode, commodification, rely on this.

that

1
See these two recent translations, Evan Calder Williams, 'Destroy Yourselves as Our Bosses. Destroy Yourselves as the Inexhaustible Vacuums of Our Domestic Labor', May 2012, https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/destroy-yourselves-as-our-bosses-destroy-yourselves-as-the-inexhaustible-vacuums-of-our-domestic-labor/

2
Pierre Macherey, 'The Productive Subject', October, 2015, https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productive-subject/

3
Carla Lonzi, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', 1970, available: https://my-blackout.com/2020/11/18/carla-lonzi-lets-spit-on-hegel/

4
Endnotes, 'An Identical Abject Subject?', *Endnotes*, No.4, October 2015, available: https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/an-identical-abject-subject

5
Fred Moten, *In the Break. The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp.1–6.

6
Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Boston, Ma.: Beacon Press, 2002, pp.18-20.

7
Wittig was also a novelist, and among the works that are translated into English the best-known is *Les Guerilleres*, her dystopian, poetic sci-fi novel about a violent and ritualistic women's society in and after the gender war.

8
Maya Gonzalez, 'Communization and the Abolition of Gender', in Benjamin Noys (Ed.), *Communization and its Discontents*, New York: Minor Compositions, 2011, p.234.

9
Ray Brassier, 'Wandering Abstraction', p.215 in this book.

10
Ibid.

11
Cinzia Arruzza, 'Logic or History? The Political Stakes of Marxist-Feminist Theory', *Viewpoint*, 23 June, 2015, available: https://viewpointmag.com/2015/06/23/logic-or-history-the-political-stakes-of-marxist-feminist-theory/

Arguments

Dissociative Unity

—

Mattin

This text takes as a starting point recent discussions around self-abolition and its paradox, as developed through this book, in order to think through the relationship between subsumption and the categories used to name aspects of capitalist social relations. By taking into account Marx's differentiation between concrete-in-act and concrete-in-thought, the essay attempts to articulate the differences between the concepts subsumption, real abstraction, reification and form-determination. Through an examination of the relationship between abstraction in thought and in reality, the subject of self-abolition is problematised.

You will kill yourself,
Without wisdom,
Without second grief,
Against yourself,
Against others,
Unless …
–Gina Fragment, *Without Laments*

We are united in reproducing the existing mode of production but we are separated by how we live it, or even further, how we die in it. In the last few years there have been many discussions around the notion of self-abolition: from the historical notion of the self-abolition of the proletariat to Afropessimism in relation to social death;[1] from feminist discussions around the abolition of women or men as a category to the abolition of gender.[2] This text begins with the concept of self-abolition because it puts into question what the categories that we are dealing with are, while simultaneously presenting us with a form of agency – however destructive – that can show us the path towards a future beyond the capitalist horizon. Therefore I will first survey some of the specific discussions around self-abolition articulated in this book in order to illuminate the problems around the formation of categories in connection to the concepts of subsumption and reification. Through this initial survey we can hope to attain a better understanding of how capitalism mediates these categories.

Self-abolition also points towards the desperate state we are in. We have a universalising economic system that generates simultaneously generic equivalence and dissociative fragmentation which produces a blinkered effect that hampers our consciousness. While the capitalist mode of production keeps expanding and unifying, our capacity to understand it seems to be increasingly limited. This goes hand in hand with the way our self-understanding is becoming narrower and more fragmented. Capitalist expansion is producing our own negation and the destruction of this planet. The question is whether it is possible to

generate a form of determinate negation that neither obliterates us nor the planet in the process. As we will see, the question of what 'us' or 'we' means becomes problematic because of the different forms of inequality and oppression that derive from specific historically developed subject formations. But if we want to overcome the universalising power of capital, the notion of 'we' needs to be radically reconsidered.

Different Forms of Self-Abolition

> Having originated within the economic and social dynamic of value, the proletariat must master this dynamic by destroying value. Thus, it is the only revolutionary class in history that must acquire the historical consciousness of its task by taking up the cause of social revolution, i.e., of its own abolition.[3]

Négation, in their 1972 text 'The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work', claimed that under conditions of real subsumption, or 'total domination' as they call it, the proletariat is already thoroughly constituted by value and the class relation and because of this, as part of the revolutionary process, the proletariat must abolish itself. Here we have what can be conceived of as the necessity of self-abolition of the proletariat in the revolutionary process. There are many consequences that emerge out of this conclusion. Here we can think of the end of programmatism i.e. workers' demands and the understanding of the movement towards communism as a problem of 'transition'. These consequences are at the core of the Marxist tendencies of communisation theory. Négation in their text criticise democracy and the state – the first as being part of the development of the theory of value and the second as the regulator of the economy. Their critique helps us to understand the limitations of social democracy and the recent figures in which it has been embodied, such as Jeremy Corbyn, Syriza, Bernie Sanders, and Podemos. Négation show us that each of these

formations are bound to fail because an affirmation of democratic demands within the nation state framework, without abolishing work, would only perpetuate value production and, therefore, also capitalism.

If we cannot have a programme, we may at least have an answer to the question of what is to be done? Abolish ourselves. However, this brings us to what Ray Brassier calls the paradox of self-abolition, which is the following: if we are constituted by the class relation and we abolish ourselves, we are also abolishing the agent of the abolition because we are nothing outside of this class relation. Therefore this abolishing of ourselves simultaneously cancels its own canceling power and because of this, it is also a re-instatement of the problematic 'we'. The notion of the abolition of the proletariat works well in relation to the paradox of self-abolition because the proletariat is constituted by the class relation, however what happens when we introduce different categories such as race and gender? Can we say that they are also constituted by the class relation? The introduction of these categories into the conceptualisation of self-abolition problematises Brassier's paradox.

Let me address two critiques of the paradox of self-abolition contained in this book. Dimitra Kotouza criticises this paradox by claiming that it is an exercise in logic that does not take into account the specificity of different subjectivities involved in social struggles. What is abolished, according to Kotouza, is not a general understanding of 'we' but 'we' understood through certain oppressive, yet valid, social categories such as 'proletariat', 'woman' and 'black'. Therefore in the process of abolition developed through the social struggles she discusses, the 'we' becomes something that is simultaneously singular and universal. For Kotouza this 'we' is open to what she describes as 'the possibility of self-definition, and the redefinition of what is human.' One cannot anticipate beforehand what this redefinition would be because it can only emerge through struggles taking place in the present. This inevitably leaves us waiting to see what

comes out of these struggles, which in some ways feels like a leap of faith. We know that we should abolish ourselves but we cannot anticipate the process, nor advance in any way where this process might take us. There might be different objectives within these struggles and perhaps some of the people struggling within them will not want to go all the way towards self-abolition.

Marina Vishmidt reads the problem of self-abolition from the perspective of gender and race through the writings of Monique Wittig, Maya Gonzalez, Fred Moten and Frank B. Wilderson III. As she points out, the 'we' is never equal and it encounters different forms and degrees of oppression. For example, Wittig suggests that there is a class relation between woman and man because 'woman' has been made an object by heterosexual-patriarchal gender relations. Abolition would be the abolition of the categories of sex, of both woman and man and heterosexuality which perpetuates patriarchy. However, women should strategically in the process affirm themselves because they have already been denied their subjectivity by the gendered class relation. For Fred Moten the question is, what does self-abolition mean to a racialised subject who was never permitted to become a subject? The slave who was an object, has resisted but has resisted as nothing. As Vishmidt points out, the slave poses questions within the issue of commodification, the subject/object division and the notion of real subsumption. What could be subsumed of that which has been made an object from the beginning of its existence, but at the same time is outside the productive relation because it is a precondition for that relation? The slave has survived as an object even though it was part of a structural nothingness and subject to physical annihilation. Orlando Patterson describes social death after the work of the anthropologist Claude Meillassoux as follows:

> The slave is violently uprooted from his milieu. He is desocialized and depersonalized. This process of social negation constitutes the first, essentially external, phase of

> enslavement. The next phase involves the introduction of the slave into the community of his master, but it involves the paradox of introducing him as a nonbeing. This explains the importance of law, custom, and ideology in the representation of the slave relation.[4]

Building on Patterson's concept of social death, Frank B. Wilderson III argues that the violence inflicted on the slave cannot be generalised to others.[5] The question here is about the relationship of the particular to the general. The ontologisation of black suffering poses difficult questions with regards to the question of subsumption, because it troubles the categories that we have to understand the subject-object relationship involved in the dialectical process of capital.

For afropessimism the slave represents an ontological abjection which is prior to the subsumption of the labour process. The social death of black bodies is a precondition for the production of value.[6] As K. Aarons points out: '[p]rior to any transgression, the Black body is subsumed by relations of direct force that do not possess the same sort of logical or instrumental coherence characterising the exploitation of wage labourers by capital, for example.'[7] This form of subsumption is a more direct form of explotation which does not pass through the necessary process of abstraction in order to become value. However, from the perspective of the present, our understanding of this prior form of subsumption, is conditioned by Marx's account of the subsumption of labour. Therefore it is difficult to assess this form of subsumption without taking into account how capitalist subsumption determines our understanding of previous processes. In afropessimism, the social death of black bodies is given an ontological status. In this essay we will interrogate this ontological assertion by claiming that the subsumption of labour under value generates the appearance of the possibility of thinking in ontological terms but this occludes the mediating process of subsumption (i.e. the social actuality of abstraction) and its consequences. Here we encounter

a problem in defining what is meant by ‘we’ and this is a part of a large and complex ongoing debate. While there are historically different forms of oppression, ‘we’ is generally designated in this text as those who are subject to the process of subsumption of the labour proccess under value.

Marina Vishmidt makes clear that the ‘we’ that we start from is unevenly constituted by particular subjects or non-subjects (in the case of Fred Moten’s account). The question is, whether abolition would reproduce these uneven relations or whether it would also destroy and generate a form of ‘we’ that is not oppressive?

Vishmidt criticises the paradox of abolition because of the universalising qualities of the ‘we’ in self-abolition, as a logical abstraction that subsumes the concrete and social and affective differences that are at work in the struggle. Replying to Kotouza, the question for Brassier is what kind of conception of personal singularity is taking place? For him ‘the singularity of persons remains a metaphysical abstraction rooted in theology and its only material qualities are the ones based on its socioeconomic status backed by the state.’[8] We have therefore, forms of oppression that have been happening before the emergence of capitalism like racism and patriarchy but through capitalism these take a specific form linked to value production. The question is: if we abolish ourselves and the forms of racialised and gendered selfhood that capitalism produces, would we be able to overcome the forms of oppression like racism and patriarchy? For Brassier, we can understand the process of abolition in Hegelian terms through *Aufhebung* (sublation) and he goes on to explain the process: sublimation abolishes positive immediacy but keeps the negativity that implodes from inside, it keeps the difference between the immediate and its mediation but destroys positive immediacy; its identity. What is being abolished is the difference between immediacy and its mediation. This does not mean to go from wrong to right but from wrong to right wrong. What is preserved in Ray Brassier's text is a form of negativity that is actually the truth of abolition, its contradictoriness.

The question that emerges here is what is happening at the material level and what is happening at the ideological level. The notion of self-abolition seems to be the last resort in moments where we have the impression that the domination of capital is total. Therefore it is important to understand what forms of totality we are describing.

Two Different Forms of Totality: Concrete-in-Act and Concrete-in-Thought

What is at stake in the discussion on self-abolition is the question of determination, what is determined by what and how to overcome that determination? As Andrés Saenz De Sicilia describes in his contribution to this book, subsumption has to do with the modes of incorporation into a systemic totality, but also the way that which is incorporated becomes shaped through a process of form-determination.[9] For example, labour-power is transformed as a commodity through a process of subsumption and through the exchange abstraction becomes value.

Through subsumption, living labour is incorporated into circulation which implies the totality of the social process. The exchange abstraction is made up of those precise moments in which subject and object become atomised as instances of commensurated, empty, homogeneous time erasing any particularities and differences between people, commodities, locality and date. The exchange abstraction is basically the process of commodification, which is also an exchange of commodities (for example buying and selling labour-power). However there is a difference between what is exchange-in-act, an activity that is not yet socially validated but which is necessary for generating real abstraction, and the act of exchange, which implies a social validation that takes into account the totality of relations, when productive forces meets circulation.[10] Here we can see how dissociative unity works: while in exchange-in-act, there is a form of sociality that we are not conscious of, in the act of exchange there is a social validation, which produces a type of consciousness that renders

opaque the sociality occurring in the act-of-exhange. Alfred Sohn-Rethel expressed this dissociation clearly: 'in exchange, the action is social, the minds are private. Thus, the action and the thinking of people part company in exchange and go different ways.'[11] In doing so our understanding of the social relations between individuals becomes perverted: 'The social relation of individuals to one another as a power over the individuals which has become autonomous, whether conceived as a natural force, as chance or in whatever other form, is a necessary result of the fact that the point of departure is not the free social individual.'[12] Here we can see how form-determination takes place within Marx's thought, in the sense that the totality of social relations in capitalism shapes not only our concrete activities (concrete-in-act) but our perception of what we do and what we are (concrete-in-thought). This in turn has effects on our understanding of what is going on precisely because we don't have access to knowledge of the totality of the social processes. Instead, we take to be natural what are in fact social and historical proccesses. Marx was already wary of these appearances in his early writings: 'The concrete content, the actual determination appears to be formal, and the wholly abstract formal determination appears to be the concrete content.'[13] The economists are the first ones to fall into this trap: '[t]he crude materialism of the economists who regard as the natural properties of things what are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations, is at the same time just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them.'[14] We can see how this idealism leads bourgeois thought to develop reified abstractions such as the individual, society and population.

If we understand subsumption as Marx applied it in his work, then it describes processes which take place strictly within the labour process that is being subsumed in the valorisation process. This means that there is always a form of human activity that needs to be commodified. Living labour, which is not yet part

of the wage relation, therefore is not yet subsumed but is determined by its relationship to dead labour which becomes fixed capital in machinery which produces new rates of exploitation. However, there is another form of totality which festishises social relations and the categories that we use. This is what has historically been called reification (*Verdinglichung*), relations between people transposed as relations between things. This is a perverted inversion between subjects and objects:

> The essence of commodity-structure has often been pointed out. Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.[15]

Lukács' famous essay on reification could well be the beginning of a totalising understanding of the effects of capitalism in our consciousness, especially when he writes: '[t]he distinction between a society where this form is dominant, permeating every expression of life, and a society where it only makes an episodic appearance is essentially one of quality.'[16] Within this process, objectified relations such as money become the active agent and the subjective powers of our activities become objectified and rendered passive. Even if some of our practices are not yet labour, the way that we conceive ourselves is through this perverted inversion. To be more precise in order to understand what exactly is being subsumed, we need to distinguish what is happening in practice and what is happening in thought. This distinction can also help us to understand the difference between subsumption and reification. The latter can be understood as a consequence of the former. If subsumption has to do with the way that labour-power, becomes socially validated as part of the valorisation process i.e. commodified in the capitalist relation, then reification is the result of mediation with real consequences

in concrete-in-thought. This process is dynamic and reification cannot be taken to be static or stable nor complete.

While we are already finding ways in this book to problematise crude totalisations of subsumption, the effects of reification can also be problematic. As Gillian Rose explains in her essay 'The Lament Over Reification': 'Whilst reification, if developed critically, could provide a term with which to investigate the extent of, and limits to, the determination of consciousness within capital, the danger of a crude conception would result in an emphasis on the very impossibility of political intervention or critical thought, and the belief solely in the revolutionary development of the forces of production.'[17] The notion of reification does not only lead to totalisations with paralysing consequences but it also still carries an existential baggage that can lead to problematic assumptions about what is authentic and inauthentic existence.

Following Marx, in a recent text Brassier points out that the difference between living and dead labour is not a 'metaphysical contrast between authentic and inauthentic existence or between lived and represented experience.'[18] Instead it is a formal contrast that has to do with how practices become socially validated, i.e. commodified. This is a crucial distinction because it helps to understand that even if there are forms of activity that are not yet commodified, the concrete-in-thought cannot access it because concrete-in-activity does not reveal to its practitioners as concrete-in-thought. Rather what is generated is their fetishistic misrepresentations and one of their effects is to generate abstract representations and totalisations. But this does not mean that critical thinking is not possible. Ray Brassier explains Marx's answer to this problem, how his critical method develops in two stages: 'first the decomposition of the abstracted (represented) concrete into its elementary components (simple abstractions); then the recombination of simple abstractions into concretely determined abstraction: the totality of determinations as concrete-in-thought.'[19] In the first totality at the level of practice (concrete-in-act), there is an activity outside the valorisation process, but the second

totality (which is concrete-in-thought), is conditioned by our understanding of ourselves and of the first totality, our understanding of practice[20]. The complex relationship between concrete-in-act and concrete-in-thought parallels a discussion that takes place in the book between two different understandings of subsumption, one historical and one logical. The historical understanding implies a periodisation in which the subsumption of labour into capital intensifies with the development of capitalism. Inevitably this understanding contains teleological implications and it allows for some forms of periodisation culminating in the total absorption of labour into capital.[21] On the other hand we have an understanding of subsumption which is part of the logic of capital and which is an integral part of the process of commodification.[22] This ambiguity might well be the reason why Marx did not include this chapter on Subsumption from *Results of the Direct Production Process* in the final draft of *Capital*, precisely because the concept of subsumption might then have carried historical connotations that could lead the reader to develop a teleological understanding of capital rather than a methodological one. One can only read the past through the lenses of the present and perhaps the telos of the concept of subsumption brought some problems to the methodological critique of capital. We can argue that at the historical level, total integration cannot be possible, because capitalism cannot fully validate and commodify all practices at once, because this would produce a conflation of concrete-in-act into concrete-in-thought which would be an idealisation. However, at the logical level, we can see how social practices in capitalism are socially validated in concrete-in-thought and determines our consciousness through the exchange relation,but the source of real abstraction arises in the process of subsumption which is precisely the interface between concrete-in-act and concrete-in-throught, between the logical and the historical processes. Marx's materialist inversion of the Hegelian *Geist* (spirit) into capital makes of our activity that which determines consciousness but this does not mean that we can be fully conscious of our activity. In contrast

to the enclosed understanding of Hegel's *Geist*, Marx opens the possibility for us to make historical interventions through practice, through revolution. However these days this hardly seems like an option and this certainly has to do with the way that concrete-in-act interacts with the concrete-in-thought. Our social activities (concrete-in-act or concrete-in-reality) in the process of subsumption produce real abstractions such as labour, money or value, and these in turn produce abstractions in our consciousness (concrete-in-thought) with categories such as the individual, society, the state, property and so on.

Unity in the Exchange Abstraction and Dissociation in Consciousness

> Exchange itself is a process of abstraction. Whether human beings [*die Menschen*] know it or not, by entering into a relationship of exchange and reducing different use-values to labour-value they actualise a real conceptual operation socially. This is the objectivity of the concept in practice. It shows that conceptuality lies not only in the minds of the philosophers but also in the reality of the object itself such that, when we speak of essence [*Wesen*], we refer precisely to that which society, without knowing it, already has in itself.[23]

We are dominated by our own activity through real abstraction in the process of exchange but at the same time we think that we can be independent and autonomous from this process. Here we can think of the different understandings that we have about the subject. Echoing Lukács' critique of a reified autonomy, Brassier, in another text, refers to Adorno's critique of enlightenment in which it appears that we are able to generate our own autonomy: 'Enlightenment […] wants to see through [*durchschauen*] the semblance of autonomy of that which is made by us. It is the human being who produces everything that appears as autonomous-in-itself, it is *thesei* [posited] and not *physei*

[natural].' But, he adds, 'The transition to independence itself is to be deduced from social dynamics', 'primary among which is the exchange abstraction.'[24]

Within this relation, three ideological interrelated assumptions emerge: the possibility under capitalist relations of autonomy, freedom and the agency of thinking. What all of these notions share is that in imagining its separation from the object, the subject reveals its dependency on the object. This can be better understood through the Marxian idea of second nature, which occurs when the exchange relation mediates our metabolic relation to nature (first nature). To talk about nature from our second nature perspective is inevitably to mythologise it and according to Brassier, this is Adorno's critique to Heidegger's ontology, because for Adorno the discrepancy between use and exchange is internal to real abstraction which in turn is based on the inequality of capitalist and labourer. Furthermore this is a critique of the Kantian understanding of an absolute spontaneity of the free will.[25] As we have seen before we cannot take for granted the freedom of the social individual. Here we can expand on dissociative unity: in concrete-in-act we generate real abstraction such as labour and value, which we are compelled to perform and reproduce without fully understanding what we are doing. The social relations as concrete-in-act become an unconscious subjectivity, a unified form of agency outside our conscious abilities, which we could call an alienated or estranged agency. Hence, we generate the forms and structures that prevent us from understanding what we are and from being free precisely because our activity (concrete-in-act) unifies itself as a real abstractions in the exchange process of mediation. Meanwhile this concrete-in-act splits at the level concrete-in-thought through the many divisions of labour, scientific development, cultural differences etc. This process in turn, leads to the appearance that we can be a subject and distance ourselves from the object. Real abstraction, which are the acts that we commit and which contain biological, cultural, economic and social elements, reflect back in consciousness

as if it is possible to cut through its own determination by simply being autonomous. Here we can see how real abstraction produces forms of reification which simultaneously produces forms of opacity that make it more difficult to trace back to the process of exchang. This *opaqueness* has led lately to examples of what we call dissociative unity, two different reified critiques of reification that are prevalent in discussion around left politics: on the one hand, we have the pessimistic perspective that ontologises capital by seeing in it as an abstract ever embracing total form of domination impossible to overcome. On the other we have another perspective that fetishises the concrete and specific as if one would be able to cut through reification by generating specific forms of life that can reproduce life outside capitalist domination. These two modes of reification mirror the double character of the commodity form: value and use-value. Resembling value we have tendencies developing from so-called value-form theory that tend to equate capital with modernity giving it an almost ontological and autonomous status.[26] Here we have an understanding of capital as an abstract entity which becomes the ultimate subject. Resembling use-value, we have tendencies that tend to express the particularity of any specific practices or identities able to resist capital domination, which can be perceived as the function that use-value has in the commodity form. The belief that we can access first nature or an ontological status without taking into account the way capitalist mediations condition our consciousness is to fall back into problematic forms of reification. This type of critique can be applied to many anarchist and insurrectionary tendencies that fetishise use-value and imagine the possibility of returning (for the first time) to a pre-modern or pre-capitalist state of things but also reactionary tendencies that take biology and race as ontological categories.

As we know both value and use-value cannot function without one another and they are part of a historical process. The categories in which we conceive ourselves have been developing hand in hand within the development of capitalism, while the

practices that we have been involved in constantly generate the illusion of a subject being able to dominate either other subjects or treat them as objects. However, at the level of totality, the only subject is the concrete-in-acts, which capitalism has been able to validate socially in the process of exchange. Even if we come from very different particular positions, we are united in the commodification process. However these specific positions are part of the dissociative process that capitalism produces in the exchange process, because it needs that cutting point in order to distinguish us from each other and from the commodities by rendering opaque the sociality involved in the concrete-in-act. The levels of fragmentation keep expanding both in the processes of the division of labour and at the level of our self-understanding. We are forced to be united in the exchange relation while having to make sense of our fragmentary selves. The abolition of capitalist unity will inevitably bring a radically different understanding of sociability, one that renders more visible the social character involved in our practices in concrete-in-act, helping to generate new forms of the subject and the 'we'. Getting rid of capitalist real abstraction and class antagonism will shift the subject/object relationship in ways that we cannot yet anticipate. This would inevitably make us reconsider the dissociative elements underneath the different forms of self-abolition that we share today.

What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?

By looking at the discussions around self-abolition we have been able to identify the complex relationship between specific categories, real and exchange abstraction and the social relations involved in the material process. Self-abolition tries to answer two questions with a single response: What is abolished? And who is doing the abolishing? Self-abolition implies an undoing of certain categories, through the process of struggle, but if the unity of the exchange abstraction still mediates our relation to each other, it seems difficult to generate determined forms of negation from categories that are mediated by this process of abstraction.

If we understand these categories solely in empirical terms, we negate the consequences of subsumption, because the exchange abstraction is not accessible through experience nor through abstract ahistorical concepts. The particular negation of an identity understood as an established category assumes a level of transparency in regards to what *is* and what *is not* subsumed under that concept and it implies the ability to trace back different relations to the process of subsumption. But this logical understanding of subsumption is problematised by Marx's account of subsumption precisely because it shows the opaqueness of the social relations that we are involved in. What we call dissociative unity produces what appears to be conceptual autonomy with regards to an established category. And this is precisely what needs to be dissentangled both conceptually and in practice. The notion of form-determination forces us to acknowledge the precise consequences that arise from the exchange relation and help us to avoid totalisations of the concept of real subsumption because it allow us to focus on the precise forms of determination involved in the process of the subsumption of labour-power under the valorisation proccess. Dissociative unity points to the process of unification through exchange abstraction and what it produces in turn, a dissociation at the level of concrete-in-thought through diferent categories that render opaque the unification we just mentioned. Abolishing the exchange abstraction is obviously different to abolishing a category made out of an abstraction, but abolishing the former will eliminate the later.

1

Frank B. Wilderson III, in 'Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption', characterises social death within the framework of Afropessimist theory in the following way: 'Afro-Pessimism is premised on an iconoclastic claim: that Blackness is coterminous with Slaveness. Blackness *is* social death, which is to say that there was never a prior meta-moment of plenitude, never a moment of equilibrium, never a moment of social life. Blackness, as a paradigmatic position (rather than as an ensemble of identities, cultural practices, or anthropological accoutrement), cannot be disimbricated from slavery.' https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/afro-pessimism-end-redemption/

2

For a discussion on the relationship between Gender Abolitionism and Communisation see Jules Joanne Gleeson, 'Abolitionism in the 21st Century: From Communization as the End of Sex, to Revolutionary Transfeminism', *Blind Field: A Jounral of Cultural Inquiry*, 7 August 2017, https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/08/07/abolitionism-in-the-21st-century-from-communisation-as-the-end-of-sex-to-revolutionary-transfeminism/

3

Négation 'The Proletariat as Destroyer of Work', p.90 in this book.

4

Orlando Patterson *Slavery and Social Death*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Mas. p.34.

5

See, for example, Frank B. Wilderson III in his last book discussing why social death and Black suffering cannot be compared to other forms of suffering: 'Afropessimism offers an analytic lens that labors as a corrective to Humanist assumptive logics. It provides a theoretical apparatus that allows Black people to not have to be burdened by the ruse of analogy – because analogy mystifies, rather than clarifies, Black suffering. Analogy mystifies Black peoples' relationship to other people of color. Afropessimism labors to throw this mystification into relief – without fear of the faults and fissures that are revealed in the process.' Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism,* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020, p.41.

6

K. Aarons, 'No Selves To Abolish: Afropessimism, Anti-Politics and the End of the World', https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/no-selves-to-abolish-afropessimism-anti-politics-and-end-world

7

Ibid.

8

Ray Brassier, 'Abolition and Aufhebung: Reply to Dimitra Kotouza' pp.484-503

9

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia explains in his essay the role of form-determination in the process of subsumption of the labour process into the valorisation process and the way it becomes intensified in real subsumption: 'Capitalist subsumption involves a struggle over the form determination of this metabolism (as a 'labour process') and its product, which by implication is also an indirect struggle over the form-determination of society as a whole. It is in this sense that we can grasp real subsumption as the crucial point of mediation between the abstract being of capital as a system and its concrete historical becoming.' Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, 'History, System and Subsumption', p.136 in this book.

10

Ray Brassier, 'Concrete-in-Thought, Concrete-in-Act: Marx, Materialism and the Exchange Abstraction', https://www.crisiscritique.org/storage/app/media/2018-03-15/brassier-v1.pdf

11

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology,* (Trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel), London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTF, 1978, p.29.

12

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse,* (Trans. by Martin Nicolaus), London: Penguin Books, 1993, p.197.

13

Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (Trans. Joseph

O'Malley), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, available: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_Hegels_Philosophy_of_Right.pdf

14

Grundrisse, op. Cit., pp.87.

15

Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness* https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm

16

Ibid. For critiques of Lukács' totalising use of reification see discussions in Rob Lucas 'Feeding the Infant' p.273 and Anthony Iles 'This Implies Nothing', p.364 in this book.

17

Gillian Rose points out how Adorno abstains from complete reification:'Therefore, to say that consciousness of society is completely reified implies that no critical consciousness or theory is possible. It is to say that the underlying processes of society are completely hidden and that the utopian possibilities within it are inconceivable. The mind (Geist) is impotent; the object is inaccessible. The thesis of complete reification is therefore unstatable, because if it were true it could not be known, and Adorno employs strategies to avoid such a paradox.' Gillian Rose, The Melancholy Science, Verso: London, 1978. p.42.

18

'Concrete-in-Thought, Concrete-in-Act: Marx, Materialism and the Exchange Abstraction', op. cit.

19

Ibid. p.119

20

Ibid. p.111: 'What is concrete-in-reality is a practical act whose nature does not reveal itself either to those executing it or to the theoretical consciousness that takes the consciousness of practitioners as its starting point.'

21

See Théorie Communiste 'Real Subsumption and the Contradiction between the Proletariat and Capital: a Historical Approach': 'Under the real subsumption of labour by capital, the defining feature of which is the extraction of relative surplus-value, everything which allowed the proletarian condition to be turned against capital disappears. The reproduction of labour-power loses all autonomy in relation to the reproduction of capital, labour is no longer the dominant element in the immediate process, the production process becomes adequate to the absorption of living labour by dead labour, the social unity of capitals is fixed by exchange at production prices – i.e., in such a way that the difference between variable and constant capital remains hidden – and the defence of the proletarian condition now becomes a mere moment of the presupposition of capital. Labour becomes totally specified as wage labour.' p.177 in this book.

22

See for example Endnotes critique of Théorie Communiste's periodisation in their 'The History of Subsumption': 'Even if we were to accept the idea of an extension of real subsumption beyond the immediate process of production, the viability of subsumption as a category for periodisation is doubtful. Since formal subsumption is a logical prerequisite of real subsumption as well as a historical one, it characterises not just one historical epoch, but the entirety of capitalist history.' https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/the-history-of-subsumption

23

Theodor Adorno, 'Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory', (Trans. Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson and Chris O'Kane), *Historical Materialism*, Vol.26, No.1, 2018.

24

Ray Brassier, 'Adorno: The Affinity of Freedom and Fatality', Keynote presented at the workshop ´Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis´, American Univerty in Cairo,13 and 14 September 2019.

25

Brassier explains this critique in his text: 'In the context of Adorno's metacritique of Kant's conception of freedom,

power accrues to the object through the fetishistic transposition of social relations between producers into relations between products; at the same time, power accrues to the person in the process wherein the self forms by spontaneously internalizing the societal subjugation of useless impulses.' Ibid.

26

'Capital, then, is a category of movement, of expansion; it is a dynamic category, "value in motion." This social form is alienated, quasi-independent, exerts a mode of abstract compulsion and constraint on people, and is in motion. Consequently, Marx accords it the attribute of agency. His initial determination of capital, then, is as self-valorizing value, as the self-moving substance that is Subject.' Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.269.

I was here. I was then there.
We see, here, that space
is often a function of time.
To be here. To be there. I cannot
be here and there at the same time. I cannot
be here and there at the same space. What?
Why not? Causation
is that which we've come to denote, that space
which is a function of time. A space
outside of time, of constant time,
there we shall be when we all
all,
        all,
                all,
        all
of us, shall
                die.
I hope that day never comes.
To hope is to hope for time.

<>

Dialogues

Keepsakes: A Response to Ray Brassier

Dimitra Kotouza

This text is a response to Ray Brassier's essay 'Wandering Abstraction'. It does not intend to respond on behalf of Endnotes – the main target of his critique. Instead, its concern is to discuss certain premises of his text which, it is argued here, pose limits to the critique of capitalist social relations. This text was originally delivered at the workshop in BIlbao and sequentially was published in *Mute*. It is republished here with added section titles, new author's notes and minor formatting changes.[1]

The debate that has been raised with the '#Accelerate Manifesto' around the modernist ideal of a rational, high-tech communist future,[2] and into which Ray Brassier has brought his discussion of Endnotes in his essay 'Wandering Abstraction', follows up on an old, perhaps hackneyed, debate within Marxism. On one side, we have a tradition of thought that begins with Marx's own texts, in which the development of the productive forces, beyond a 'senile' capitalism that suffers from internal contradictions,[3] provides the premise for the development of communism. From this, following Engels, sprang the notion of a rationally-planned, equitable economy and society, which still haunts the imagination of many a socialist or communist. On the other side, there is the tradition of the European ultra-left, and of post-1968 critiques of work, productivism, and of the transition period, from which theories of communisation and Endnotes themselves descend.

The differences between the two perspectives are conspicuous, yet Brassier attempts to bring them to bear upon each other in relation to the question of the relationship between knowledge and social form which, for him, relates to communist theory's traction upon class antagonism. It is the question of the 'articulation of cognitive abstraction with social abstraction', and

> what exactly distinguishes 'good', i.e. cognitively virtuous and politically emancipatory abstraction, from 'bad', i.e. cognitively deficient and politically reactionary abstraction. How do the abstract categories of the Marxist dialectic – capital, labour, value-form, commodity, circulation, production, etc. – succeed or fail to map contemporary social reality when deployed in competing (and often politically antagonistic) explanations? What theory is fit to recognise 'the real movement abolishing the present state of things' in conditions of real subsumption?

The relationship between cognitive abstraction (knowledge) and social (or real) abstraction indeed concerns the ability to critique both capitalism and our own practice in struggles and everyday life. If the production of knowledge is determined by capitalist social forms, how far does this social determination go, and how is critique possible? Indeed, this is a problem that emerges quite glaringly if the social domination of capital is articulated as the subsumption of all social life under capital's logic, as the 'logicisation of social reality', which tends to hypostatise social form. However, I want to show that, in following Endnotes' line of thought and attempting to bring it to bear upon Accelerationism, Brassier commits a slippage. While recognising that it is practice which produces social abstraction, his discussion of cognition and theory identifies the question of how we can know which practices abolish existing social abstractions but, as we will see, leaves out that of the transformation of cognition by revolutionary practice. As a result, the question of the validity of theory becomes one of not only distinguishing 'good' theoretical abstractions but also of distinguishing 'between progressive and regressive social forms'. While communist theory, however, as the self-critique in the process of struggles, is tasked with criticising the oppressive practices the struggles themselves might produce, it is not meaningful for it to classify in this way existing social forms or 'forms of mediation'.

The problem with this approach is that it posits a single decision-making subject (the subject of theory), and *reduces the concept of social form to discrete elements that can be identified and separated from one another* in capitalist society. First, it affirms the possibility of a theoretical decision by a uniform 'we' that predates a revolutionary moment, and in doing so it pre-empts the multiplicity of *desires and conflicts* that are unleashed in struggles, reducing them into decision-making to be carried out today (usually by intellectuals like us) as *representative of a non-existent universal humanity.* In being reductive of such a multiplicity, this is also a pre-emptive act of power in defining that humanity. The knowledge that provides answers to questions of mediation – how

we want to live and relate to one another – cannot but be *mediated by the struggles* that transform the very meaning of the human, creating the very possibility of producing meaningful and practicable answers to such questions. Second, as will become clearer later in Brassier's text, this identification of the 'progressive' social form reduces critical thought to *having to locate a hidden emancipatory element in the present, which must be preserved* against what would otherwise be, it is argued, an 'indeterminate negation'. The defence of antivirals that then appears towards the end of Brassier's text, while appearing slightly disconnected from the preceding discussion, is not an accident but sheds light on what he has in mind when he speaks of emancipatory forms of mediation.

This project of locating emancipatory elements in the present is not merely an attempt to find something from which to begin, but is founded on the progressivism that has hampered Marxist thought for over a century. The warnings against 'the repudiation of modernity' and 'cancelling the emancipatory potentials latent in technologies' can be seen as attached to a *conservative interpretation* of the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*.[4] This is the idea that the overcoming of capitalism is not a total transformation, a negation of everything that exists so that something new might emerge, which will, inevitably, contain radically altered elements of the old world; rather, this overcoming must necessarily leave intact the 'progressive' elements latent within capitalism, because it is those elements that point towards its overcoming. Despite Marx's best insights on historical determination only being applicable *retrospectively,*[5] this approach wishes to *locate the future in the present instead of producing it from the premises of the present.* In this case, technology, science and reason are identified as the elements containing that potential for future emancipation, established by the argument that there must be *some* possibility of critical knowledge within capitalism, or else there is no possibility of an overcoming.

If we argue that such a 'positive element' or progressive force of capitalism is nowhere to be found, we do away with a

supposedly unquestionable historical mechanic of an overcoming, not its possibility. We open the way for a criticism of all those elements of capitalism, hereto seen as objects of liberation, through to their very core.[6] The 'forces of production', capitalism's accelerating force, and even that 'rationality', are no longer to be seen as something good that has become 'perverted' but are to be critiqued *as such.* If the abolition of capitalism is possible, our questions are now forced to go beyond a defensive philosophy of history. We have to produce theory based on the struggles that take place *today,* when the notion of *communism as progress* has lost all social validity. The failure of past revolutions, the decline of the workers' movement, the failure of social movements to make any significant gains in the past 40 years that would add up to a unifying 'dynamic' have killed off any delusion that history is on the side of proletarians. History has to be produced, everything has to be reconsidered.

This critique cannot be complete, cannot overcome the limitations of social determination, if it is merely theoretical. It is only when theory attempts to achieve a transhistorical objectivity beyond the limitations imposed on its vision by its social and historical determination and positionality that it has to provide proof of that objectivity. Brassier indeed identifies a problem in the lack of reflexivity implied in the statement that theory just 'is' the self-critique of struggles. Every theory takes a specific stance within struggles; the problem begins if this stance is elevated to a universal, ahistorical claim that ignores the knowledge produced by the historical process of impasses and conflicts within struggles and its own specific historical context. And it is particularly in this historical moment that *the dialectic between theory and practice becomes a problem instead of an answer*: revolutionary theories and projects can only with great difficulty avoid being gestural, because of the long-standing disintegration of traditional organisational forms in which intellectuals had previously played a decisive role. In this context, the question is how to discover the limits faced and possibilities produced in existing

struggles, which are central to an analysis of the capital relation in this period. In doing so, we inevitably attempt to construct ways in which these struggles might begin to negate this world despite the enormous difficulty of maintaining such a perspective without descending into pure ideology. We then see struggles facing a state that no longer integrates demands (except if they concern policing immigration and sending women back to their 'proper places').[7] Demands appealing to bourgeois ideals such as 'we are citizens'; 'we are hard working'; 'we are also human' confront a state whose main concern is to police and silence (if not kill) proletarians who are treated as an inessential appendage to capitalist reproduction. While these struggles can end with the empowerment of the most reactionary types of demands, we can *sometimes* also identify forms of (temporary) negation, which are usually blamed for being more destructive than they are 'socially constructive', for they tend to question (for example, by looting and rioting, but also by articulately defending their actions) oppressive forms of sociality implied by such bourgeois concepts and institutions as civil society, the nation, the community of citizens, rights and responsibilities, lawful political conduct and commodity exchange, as the weapons of state and bourgeois power in capitalist society.[8] This criticism is *negative* (reaching levels of suicidalness) because the positivity of 'communist society' is today an unknown, the narrative that once led to it is defunct, and all we have is a limited criticism of the present through the practices of a fragmented proletariat with no ambition to unify or take power and manage anything at all. This criticism produces conflicts within struggles that seem insurmountable.[9] But this lack of unity and of a future is fully material, and not an ideological falsity that can be cognitively defeated. Theory cannot presume a decision-making revolutionary unity, because the latter can only begin to be produced in the process of abolishing the social divisions that fragment it.

The very premises of the question of categorising 'oppressive' and 'emancipatory' social forms and mediations are

then mistaken. The question should instead become one of how objective and subjective relations and forms of being can transform and become other than (beyond), capitalist. This is a question of the process of a radical criticism of the present and of the possibility of overcoming the limits of who we are. It conceives of transformation through struggles and internal conflicts within them; *not via the classification of the stuff of this world outside of the process that transforms it,* and certainly not through looking in advance for something to preserve.

Mediation Is a Question, Not an Answer

The question is also posed in another way in Brassier's text. In agreement with Endnotes, he criticises Camatte's notion of the subsumption of life and subjectivity under capital, which leads the latter to propose an exit into a 'genuine' human community as the only way of dealing with a totalising capital. He pushes Endnotes on one point: subsumption does not mean that capital's logicisation subsumes all of social activity, but only labour.

> Thus capital's logicisation of reality is itself conditioned by that reality; this is the bulwark against absolute idealism, which would hypostatise capital as a wholly autonomous, self-moving subject (a causa sui or self-causing being) floating free of material reality altogether

Indeed, there are valid grounds for this criticism of Camatte, as well as for the warning against formulations that overstate capital's ability to give reality a conceptual form. The latter would entail the mystifying reduction of transformative practice to a notion of an impossible struggle against concepts (value, first and foremost). These points, however, cannot extend to rehabilitating the target of Camatte's criticism: the 'growth of productive forces as condition *sine qua non* for liberation'; communism as a 'new mode of production' (or the 'free association of producers'); the mystification of both struggles and the class relation under

capitalism.[10] The concept of the subsumption of all social life under capital is not required to make this criticism. The critical concepts of fetish and real abstraction are sufficient. The fetishism ubiquitous in capitalism, its objectification that obscures mediation – the objectifying naturalisation of commodities and their exchange obscuring the social relation they mediate; the obscured mediation of capital's expansion by an exploitative process of production – is produced through the very practices of social reproduction and in that sense it is socially valid. The problem with the adoption of the 'growth of productive forces' as the ultimate revolutionary end is not just that conceptual abstraction is socially determined, and hence always at risk of reproducing the fetishisms of capital, nor the supposed capitalist subsumption of all subjectivity, but rather that *it presupposes the social practice that produces the real abstraction of abstract labour,* upon whose management a society is founded, and most likely also a state, as a centralised mechanism that administers this 'growth'. It is in this sense that the attachment to modernity must be criticised: not as a corruption of the eternal human community, but as a fetishism that objectifies and eternalises capitalist expansion, commodities, capitalist technology, knowledge and institutions, blind to the social mediations from which these are inseparable: the world-scale management and enforcement of exploitative social relations, and all the ensuing suffering and death. Indeed, as Brassier writes, in a corrective to certain formulations of Endnotes, 'the key to the de-reification of abstraction is an account of conceptual form as generated by social practices.' It is historically emerging, generalised practices of social reproduction that produce conceptual forms (real abstractions) adequate to social forms. These social abstractions can, again, only be abolished through the transformation of social practice. While our critical faculties might be able to identify these mediations and practices, it is only through a process of practical critical activity within struggle that the question of non-oppressive forms of mediation can open up, and only through this process can the

question of non-oppressive practices be answered collectively.[11] These practices can become new social forms only when socially generalised. Beyond this context, life in capitalism still forces us, in our daily practice, to reproduce existing social forms.

Brassier's criticism of Camatte for his 'appeal to a human community whose basic expressive modalities remain constant across millennia' is also justified. While the abolition of capitalism, however, cannot be an undoing or a wish that 'capitalism never happened', it also cannot be a 'realisation' of a progressive 'promise' that capitalism holds within itself. At the very least, this promise is not an identifiable 'emancipatory' element of modernity that needs to be 'released' instead of being critiqued. If there is a problem with a dialectic of alienation that prescribes a reunification with an idealised nature and a naturalised, a-historical humanity, this is not overcome by the rehabilitation of a concept of modernity that merely needs to be unfettered from the corrupting domination of value in order to become true to itself. History is not produced ex-nihilo, but it is also not a 'realisation' of a pre-existing element, whether that is conceived as natural or historically determined. *History can only be narrativised as some kind of 'realisation' retrospectively.*

The appeal to a human community can also not be satisfyingly countered by reaffirming a concept of society. Brassier argues in favour of the necessity of mediation 'on a planet of seven billion people', so that a real universality, 'a maximally expansive human solidarity' can exist beyond parochial communitarianism. He reminds us of the concept of 'species being': 'understood not as a biological category but as the capacity for collective self-transformation (beyond self-reproduction), that staves off the divisive identifications of individuality, ethnicity, nationality'. It is worth considering this interpretation of species being beyond the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* – whose theme of alienation can be considered as problematic as Camatte's authentic community, particularly if 'life activity' is not deciphered from labour, posing restrictions on what the human

can be.[12] If such a universality could then involve multiple and singular 'life activities' that collectively transform the human, the question of how social 'human activity' could one day be something different than the abstract labour mediated by value is again extremely hard to answer.

Brassier proposes that 'impersonality, impartiality and objectivity' should not just be seen as correlates of alienation, but also as 'positive resources for expanding the horizons of socialisation'. The association of the concept of universality with the impersonal, the impartial and the objective, however, again appears one-sided and insufficient, sounding like the all too familiar principle of bourgeois legal judgement. Laws and legal procedures are established to apply to the abstract individual 'objectively' and 'impartially', although of course these values leave unquestioned the principles and social relations these laws reproduce.[13] Bourgeois equality, just like abstract labour, is founded on precisely this kind of impersonality: individuals devoid of content and particularity, and most importantly, devoid of materiality (bodily or economic) in a political sphere that is by definition blind to it. So 'fairness' is translated into meritocracy: if you can't, you don't deserve – it's nothing 'personal', you are just not good enough, 'objectively'. Letting the homeless die is the apotheosis of the bourgeois notion of equality. The emphasis on the indispensability of 'impersonality' only presents itself as a given necessity and as an ideal because, in capitalism, the 'impersonal' is the level of law and right, of society, while the 'personal' is supposed to be identified with pre-capitalist forms of community. In reality, *power operates within capitalism at both impersonal and personal levels,* if the gender relation is not set aside as a pre-capitalist social form, and capitalism's overcoming must also be thought at both levels. The 'personal', apart from a form of social power, also designates the social level at which the singularity of each person in their full material dimension, in their difference, can be *recognised.* Here the point is absolutely not a democratist prescription of 'mutual recognition' in processes of struggle. Rather it is the conception

of communism as a state of *'radical insecurity'*,[14] if the abolition of constraining social categories is to not merely reproduce the rigid universality of 'man', but instead open up a process of radical self-re-definition as a dialectic between the universal and the particular. The process of recognition is never a neat one-off abstract classification but always under contestation of both recogniser (the social) and recognised. It also means that the meaning of 'human' is multiple and open-ended. This dialectic is impossible under a notion of universality that gives primacy to the impersonal and to the closure of objectivity.

It should be clear that 'expanding the horizons of socialisation' is itself not an unequivocal ideal. Particularly when, in capitalism, as much as in socialist (or 'state-capitalist' as some prefer to call them) states, it has meant the socialisation of labour and the unification of 'individuals' under the state. We agree, then, that 'mediation' is a problem, but are wary of the usual answers. How can universality be prevented from becoming a *bourgeois* universality, a legal universality, based on the rational classification of empty individuals that sacrifices or oppresses the exceptional or unclassifiable particular for the benefit of 'society'?[15] How can it not become an impersonal, oppressive social unity akin to that imposed by the bourgeois state? Rushing to identify 'good' mediations and abstractions within capitalism risks falling back to automatic answers: bourgeois law, labour time, the state.

To Abolish is to Become Other Than What We Are

Based on Endnotes' formulations that appear to suggest the absolute constitution of subjectivity by capital, Ray Brassier identifies 'the paradox of self-abolition' and raises the question of agency in the process of communisation:

> Since the 'we' is constituted by the class relation, the self-overcoming of the 'we' is the overcoming of the relation that constitutes it. This is certainly theoretically uncompromising (and admirable because of it). But it is

> also paradoxical, and its paradoxical character exacerbates its status as a claim that articulates conceptual and social abstraction at an ontological level. The paradox is the following: if 'we' are constituted by the class relation that we have to supersede, then the supersession of this relation is also the overcoming of the agent of the supersession, and therefore the cancelling of the supersession and the re-instatement of the 'we'. Since 'we' have no position apart from the class relation, 'we' are nothing outside of it. But then the moment of the abolition of this relation is also that of the abolition of its abolition.

The paradox is of course only valid if we accept the logicisation of reality and subjectivity of which Brassier accuses Endnotes, or make a literal interpretation of the statement that 'we are nothing outside the class relation': if the subject of struggle abolishes itself, who will be left as an agent of communisation? The statement should not be taken literally, abolition should not be understood as obliteration, and obliteration should not be understood as abolition. Proletarians can literally die outside the class relation.[16] This does not mean the social category 'proletarian' is abolished. Conversely, abolition is a transformation of subjects, not their physical or mental death. 'Nothing outside' means that *proletarian identity* cannot be affirmed *today,* not because capital is an absolute subject whose 'logic' determines reality and subjectivity to the extent that struggle and history no longer exist, but rather because proletarian reproduction is now entirely dependent on capitalist reproduction *and* the present model of accumulation treats labour-power as a mere cost. Not only is a flight no longer possible as proletarian life entirely depends on accumulation (at the same time as any guarantees of such life are defunct),[17] but proletarians are also unable to find a positivity in themselves as part of accumulation. Self-abolition then emerges as a *possibility* when the self-affirmation of class identity becomes no more than the affirmation of a category of capital, variable capital,

whose disposability and fragmentation erodes the class's capacity for organising politically to affirm itself in demand-centred struggles. Only the practical criticism of one's position as it exists and is reproduced in capitalist society, then, has the potential to abolish the relation of which it is part.

The formulation based on a 'we' also assumes a given unified subject in the beginning of the process, which, as argued above, does not exist today. Instead, the theory of *rift* has attempted to theorise the possibility of self-abolition arising in today's conditions of class fragmentation. It has paid attention to moments where internal conflicts within struggles emerge because the identity of those who struggle cannot be affirmed and itself becomes a limit. The 'we' that is abolished in this conception is then not just any collective subject, and certainly not a universal human subject, but the material subjectifications of the relations of exploitation and power in capitalist society: proletarians, capitalists and the multiple positions in the division of labour; women, men and other classifications of gender; racialised groups. These subjectifications already exist, and struggles are already based upon them. The question is *what happens next,* that is, how subjects can overcome what they are by abolishing the *relations* that reproduce these subjectifications. The universality *and* singularity that could emerge from this abolition is not the same as the particularity of the subject that carried it out (itself only emerging in the process of struggle); if proletarians abolish 'proletarian' as a valid social category, if they abolish the class relation, they are no longer proletarians: women are no longer women – their bodily difference has no oppressive social significance – 'blacks' are no longer 'blacks' and so on. They produce themselves as *something else* that is both singular and universal, creating the possibility of self-definition and of the re-definition of what is human,[18] inventing new ways of relating to one another and to the world. It is the *something else* this abolition produces, the de-subjectification which objectively overcomes the limit of what one is, that the paradox seems to rule out.

This, however, is the conception of a *potential* transformation, not the application of a logical necessity. The concept of self-abolition is conceivable not as a logical unfolding but as a potential that we can decipher in the present historical conjuncture because of the decline of the politics of affirmation. We could, of course, be proven entirely wrong.

There are some even more important problems concerning self-abolition: How can proletarians struggle without forming into a self-affirmative subject? What are the practices that would suggest a self-negating subject? How far can this self-negation go? This is not a question posed abstractly at the level of subjectivity, but it emerges in the process of struggle: the burning of factories can seem to be a rejection of labour, but it is often part of demand-centred struggles in places like India, Bangladesh or Vietnam. Rioting and uprisings can be part of the affirmation of a national identity, as we have seen in Ukraine. Women and men demonstrating against rape can, at the same time, through their demands, be affirming the state and the family, as we saw in India. We can say that these are the internal limits of struggles, and that these very limits are their dynamic (Théorie Communiste),[19] but often there is hardly any dynamic towards the overcoming of such limits. And of course, struggle does not occur in a vacuum. Apart from internal limits there are also external ones, such as the force of the state, with its police and army, as well as the necessities of survival. Finally, the 'we' that should be problematised is not just the 'we' of self-abolition, but also the 'we' that builds a society, the very conception of the universal and of what 'society' is, as discussed above.

Capitalist Relations Condition Technological Functions

Endnotes' argued lack of distinction between conceptual and real abstraction is said to lead them to a wholesale rejection of technology's 'function' as such. Bringing up antivirals as an example of 'emancipatory potentials latent in technologies whose functioning is currently subordinated to capital', Brassier recognises the

envelopment of these technologies in capitalist social forms, but conceives of their function as something that can be separated:

> A suitably abstract conception of function will allow for its transplantation, and where necessary, repurposing, across social contexts.

Current technology's 'emancipatory potential' or 'function', however, is not merely something mechanical. It is evidently grounded on its use-value today, since the whole point in maintaining a 'function' is its utility. But the emphasis on the very question of *keeping* a useful function is a holding on to how we live today that sets limits on its criticism. Following the example of antivirals, why should we assume today that, in the future, survival from illness would have to involve medicine as it exists today? And even if this is the case, how is it possible to extricate this 'function' from its system of production, the complex, oppressively hierarchical divisions of labour and power relations (between the 'specialist' knowledge-producer and the human 'objects' of medical science; between the researcher and the factory workers) on which today depend the production of medical knowledge as well as the commodities based on it? Further, is it conceivable to extricate this 'function' and its social usefulness from the very definitions of 'health' and 'illness' and the social hierarchies they imply? The *use-value* this argument attempts to extract as an 'emancipatory potential' from within capitalist commodities cannot exist as a mere mechanical or biological functionality that can be separated from the social, the capitalist mode of relating in the process of its production and consumption, even less so from its subjection to exchange-value. This is the fetishism that reduces a commodity to the natural or mechanical properties of a thing, blanking out the social relations and processes its existence depends on. Antivirals (and other medicine and medical techniques and technologies) are, today, produced as commodities, *and this shapes both their social and material aspects,* because use-value

is the other side of exchange-value, which drives the production of commodities. Taken as far as it can go, this criticism of use-value is the condition of possibility for the production of new forms of knowledge or technology, which are not guided by value, nor by labour as the universal quality of humanity, but by an entirely different logic of relating.

Refusing to keep this abstract notion of function, Brassier objects, 'abolishes the capitalist present at the cost of cancelling the post-capitalist future locked up within it. Foreclosing the future, blinkered negation cannot but wish to re-instate the past. It becomes the longing for a previous state of things'. From this perspective, the current anti-development struggles against the very material form and function of mines and factories, high-speed trains, airports, etc, often despite high local unemployment, could be dismissed as localist, or attached to a 'past' way of life. And, in a sense, they are. Here is the contradiction: mines are highly polluting, and they involve punitive forms of labour, so much so that for many communities agriculture is strongly preferable. Mines also provide the raw material for most of today's advanced technology. If the enjoyment of a forest, or the use of its water for agriculture, can be conceived as desiring a 'previous state of things' over the advances of capitalist mining, this only shows that the 'achievements of capitalist modernity' presuppose forms of technological function which, particularly at the points of production, are not universally welcome despite their usefulness. Equally unwelcome would be a 'repurposing' that would fall short of a *complete* transformation of such technology, including the form and logic of knowledge production it is based on, its process of production and the purpose to which it is put; that is to say, a complete transformation of its function. In every case, the question of technologies, and not just of products but also of the production technologies on which they are premised, is and will continue to be (in any potentially revolutionary situation) a point of conflict and struggle, which cannot be forestalled by a rational decision that claims to represent all sides of the conflict.

More problematically, the concept of 'repurposing' presupposes an agent that manages production, having appropriated capitalism's infrastructure. While Brassier does not appear to subscribe to the Accelerationist notion of a central, rational planning authority that would be able to accelerate the forces of production to exceed everything imaginable under capitalism, the question remains of how the production of all the technologies whose 'functions' are still 'useful' would be managed in the future society he imagines, if not through a central authority or a state. If social unity is to be founded on complex global-scale production, and if such production is to continue functioning with today's effectiveness, this would require a complex and hierarchical division of labour, which presupposes social divisions, as well as a centralised power that would ensure that things *function,* that everyone who is able to 'contributes to society' by working and everyone is 'fairly' remunerated. Beyond the difficult problem of mediation (what would be the measure of 'fairness' here?), there is also the question of how this could take place without the specialisation of management, and by extension *social management.*[20]

If 'determination is not constitution', if the articulation of social and theoretical abstraction remains an open question, it does not follow that theory should be oriented towards conserving 'the achievements of capitalist modernity'. The danger of assuming that the problems outlined here are solvable rationally or scientifically, the problem with placing existing 'technological advances' at the centre of communist thought is that, in effect, the old society risks being reproduced within the purportedly new one. Criticism targets an abstract notion of the subsumption of cognition, but falls short of addressing the system of production implied by each one of today's 'useful' commodities, and fails to acknowledge existing and historical struggles against forms of centralised social management and the state, against the hierarchical division of labour and the social divisions implied by it; against work (particularly factory work); against a notion of the social that is centred around production; against the enforced

inclusion into the social via a law based on an abstract universal Man; against the very kind of socialisation effected by capitalism, all of which are premises of today's forms of knowledge, technology, and rationality. Capitalism's overcoming cannot be founded upon these forms, but will have to negate them also, before new forms of knowledge production emerge on the basis of a different social relation.

1

Author's Note (2021): Since writing this text, the terms in which I would articulate these questions have changed considerably. I have published an updated view in *Surplus Citizens* (Pluto Press, 2019), Part II, 'Becoming Surplus: Struggle and its Limits'.

2

'The fetishisation of openness, horizontality, and inclusion of much of today's "radical" left set the stage for ineffectiveness. Secrecy, verticality, and exclusion all have their place as well in effective political action … Real democracy must be defined by its goal—collective self-mastery. This is a project which must align politics with the legacy of the Enlightenment…' Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, '#Accelerate Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics', *Critical Legal Thinking*, 14 May 2013, http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/

3

While Karl Marx rarely wrote of a rationally-planned economy and society, his writings left space for such an interpretation: if communism is the full development of the forces of production, and communism a more 'advanced' society, it could follow that what really overcomes capitalism is the technological development of productivity. Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol.3*, Chapter 15: 'Here the capitalist mode of production is beset with another contradiction. Its historical mission is unconstrained development in geometrical progression of the productivity of human labour. It goes back on its mission whenever, as here, it checks the development of productivity. It thus demonstrates again that it is becoming senile and that it is more and more outlived.'

4

This argument is not interested in debating the correct interpretation of Hegel, but instead it targets the manner in which Hegelian concepts have often been used in Marxist theory. The point of criticism is the use of a specific philosophy of history to make an argument about how communist theory and practice ought to proceed: the supposition that because this 'positive element' must exist, theory is obliged to find it and promote its preservation.

5

'Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the

subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc. But not at all in the manner of those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society.' Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (Trans. Martin Nicolaus), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p.105.

6

Author's Note (2021): Such critique does not entail a refusal to use or distribute life-saving technologies and knowledges produced under capitalist conditions, such as medicines or vaccines produced for profit. However, removal of the profit motive could positively transform both their production process and how they affect living organisms. The victims of dehumanising capitalist state violence often have a justified mistrust towards medical knowledge and technologies endorsed by that state – although current discourses against vaccination largely have reactionary origins and aims.

7

Of course, the state never integrated all social demands, but it is worth making the historical comparison with the period and model of accumulation called 'Keynesian', 'Fordist' or 'Social-Democratic' to recognise the enormous difference between that social contract (wages-productivity deal) and the present one.

8

The uprising in both West and East Ukraine might be presented as an example here: rioting, and even war, against the state did not entail a critique of the state; in fact, the rebels themselves became the state, imposing wage and pension cuts and shooting down protesters (see https://libcom.org/article/social-protest-and-repression-donbass). Indeed, these purely negative moments referred to here might be the exception in today's struggles, but it is a powerful and recurring exception.

9

Consider, for example, the intergenerational conflict that has emerged in the struggle in Ferguson. See R.L., 'Intextinguishable Fire, Ferguson and Beyond', *Mute*, 17 November 2014, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/inextinguishable-fire-ferguson-and-beyond

10

Jacques Camatte *The Wandering of Humanity*, Detroit: Black & Red, 1975.

11

Author's Note (2021): It should be emphasised that 'practical critical activity' is *not a feature of all social struggle*. It is a potential, created in the context of social contestation, to question how we live together, and to test answers, materially confronted by local and global levels of interdependence.

12

'The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic* body – both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. […] In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor estranges the species from man. […] For labor, *life activity, productive life* itself, appears to man in the first place merely as a means of satisfying a need – the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life.' Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,* 'Estranged Labour', https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm

13

The application of a law equally, objectively and impartially to 'all' is what courts do. If it is mostly proletarians that end in jail, if cops get away with murder, this is not caused by the judges' bias but by the very content of the law. What is socially defined as 'criminal', however, is an act of power, and the result of very *partial* social struggle. The notion of a true impartiality and objectivity would imply the resolution of all struggles and debates, but is this not precisely what courts assume as true when they apply the law?

14

Here, the *recognition* of singularity or difference is counterposed to

the separation, classification and hierarchisation of individuals according to their capacity to labour or to consume, their 'usefulness to society', and according to the division of labour, through the production of the social distinctions of gender, race, age, health and more. The latter is consistent with a notion of universality based on the abstract 'man' that presupposes ideal norms (young healthy white man) and 'exceptions' (female, non-white, old, disabled and more). Implied here, in contrast to Brassier's Kantian notion of freedom, are the concepts of recognition, self-determination and freedom based on an interpretation of Hegel proposed by Richard Gunn. See Richard Gunn, '"Recognition" in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', *Common Sense*, No.8, March 1988: 'A common "world", or in other words a "valid external world" which could prechannel recognition into authoritative configurations and which could serve as a shared touchstone to which interacting individuals might refer, is just what the play of mutual recognition excludes. The (Revolutionary) demolition of such a "world", and of the role of definitions inhering in it, was required to effect the transition from a misrecognitive to a mutually recognitive terrain ... radical insecurity is the sole statute under which mutual recognition can come into being, and through which it can sustain itself.' (p.58).

15

Author's Note (2021): Contrary to communitarian forms of social critique, contemporary capitalist states do not promote individualism as such but rather the ideology of economic independence (in the form of wage-dependence) as the primary way of being 'useful to society'.

16

Author's Note (2021): More accurately – proletarians can literally die when excluded from wage relations.

17

On the question of the integration of the circuits of capitalist and proletarian reproduction, see Screamin' Alice. 'On the Periodisation of the Capitalist Class Relation'. *Sic*, No.1 (November 2011) pp.171–96.

18

See footnote 8.

19

See R.S., 'The concept of cycle of struggles', https://libcom.org/library/concept-cycle-struggles-roland-simon

20

Author's Note (2021): This question appears to assume *all* forms of 'social management' are problematic. If indeed the implicit claim was that spontaneous self-organisation is *always* preferable, I could no longer defend such a claim.

Abolition and *Aufhebung:* Reply to Dimitra Kotouza

Ray Brassier

This exchange, which began with the publication of Ray Brassier's 'Wandering Abstraction' in *Mute* in February 2014, and developed further in a discussion between Kotouza and Brassier at a seminar in Bilbao. The following text developed from their correspondence following the seminar and remained unpublished until now. All quotations are from Dimitra Kotouza's text 'Keepsakes', unless otherwise indicated.

I want to begin by noting my points of agreement with Dimitra Kotouza's criticisms:[1] they cut to the core of the issues at stake and by exposing the inadequacy of many of my formulations present me with an opportunity to clarify my position. Ultimately, these criticisms boil down to a single rejoinder: because they retain cognitive categories and social forms rooted in capitalist social relations ('keepsakes'), my objections to communisation betray a conservatism precluding any genuinely revolutionary break with capitalism. This is a salutary criticism because it clarifies the underlying issue: what kind of negation is at stake in the overthrowing of capitalism? Kotouza charges me with a fundamentally conservative appeal to determinate negation (*Aufhebung*). Her rejoinder is that communism is capitalism's abolition, not its sublation. On her account, communisation is radical precisely because it practices a form of negation that refuses to be determined by what it negates: i.e., commodification, property, wage-labour, law, the state, and ultimately, value itself. At the same time, Kotouza concedes that 'total transformation', understood as 'the negation of all that exists', will also 'contain radically altered elements of the old world.' Since we both agree that communism is not the remainderless annihilation of everything that exists – transfigurative annihilation is the purview of religious eschatology, not historical materialism – the crux is understanding what 'radically altered' means here. We know that communism entails the abolition of class, wage-labour, private property, the state, etc. This is a negative determination of its logical space; i.e., what communism must exclude. But we do not know what new social forms or experiential possibilities this exclusion will generate. Thus, we lack any positive determination of communism's qualitative characteristics; i.e., what communism will be like.[2] The question then is whether the negative determination of communism's logical space, even if it entails no positive determination of its qualitative content, nevertheless entails a determination of this negation, such that negated content co-determines the form of its negation. My conviction that it does

is broadly Hegelian (although I cannot substantiate this here). However, to say that content co-determines the form of its negation is not to say that content is preserved through its negation. What sublation preserves is the difference between the immediate and its mediation, not the identity of the immediate. Sublation is not the contrary of abolition but its truth: sublation abolishes positive immediacy while preserving the negativity that corrodes it from within. Abstracted from this movement, indeterminate negation perpetuates the positivity it aims to abolish because it misses its contradictoriness. 'Radical alteration' is the retroactive movement from immediate to mediate difference, in which contradiction is conserved, not the progress from determination to determination, in which identity is preserved. In political terms, it is the movement from wrong to the right wrong, not from wrong to right.

Kotouza's rejection of determinate negation as intrinsically conservative derives at least in part from her conviction that both the form and content of negation can be determined only 'in and through actual struggles'. However, the impossibility of pre-determining the effective (*wirklich*) form and content of negation for any specific instance does not justify the claim that its specific effectivity (*Wirlichkeit*) is un- or in- determined. This insistence that the work of determination unfolds in and through effective struggles is correct as far as it goes. But the claim that 'struggles alone' (which here also seems to imply the *experiences* generated through struggles) are practically and conceptually determining threatens a retreat to empiricism, which is simply the obverse of programmatism. It suggests that struggle is the exclusive matrix for the form and content of negation, downplaying the extent to which struggles are formed by and structured around determinate social contents. A one-sided emphasis on struggle as the sole source of an absolute but indeterminate negativity, disregarding struggle's objective structural determinations, is also an empiricist capitulation to the existing order of things. The danger of such capitulation follows from the merely subjective rejection of the objective domain encompassing social and cognitive forms.

The term ‘communism’ carries a historical weight that makes it imperative to preserve the fundamental distinction between subjective rejection and objective negation (where ‘objective’ here encompasses everything currently characterised as ‘subjective’). To ask ‘What is transformed and how?’ is to consider more closely what it is exactly that distinguishes revolutionary negation from a subjectivist conception of abolition whose radicalism turns out to be superficial. In this regard, I think the conservation of objective social and cognitive form for which Kotouza reproaches me is mirrored by the conservation of subjective form presupposed by her critique. This is the conservation of what Kotouza describes as a ‘potentiality’ for ‘self-transformation’ persisting despite capitalist social relations.[3] To the extent that this potential is supposed to be the wellspring for the abolition of capitalist social relations, the question then is whether the unmediated subjective negation of capitalism can ever give rise to communism.[4] I propose to address this question by considering the three fundamental problems raised by Kotouza’s objections:

The problem of the unity of the subject of struggle
The problem of the production of history
The problem of repurposing

1. The Unity of the Subject of Struggle

Kotouza thinks I commit a slippage from the claim that cognition is conditioned by practice to the claim that cognition can discriminate a priori between those practices which can and those which cannot abolish the real abstractions of capital (this is the question of the correlation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ cognitive abstractions on one hand; and ‘progressive’ and ‘regressive’ social forms on the other). The problem with this approach, Kotouza agues, is twofold. First, it ignores how revolutionary practice transforms cognition. Second, it assumes ‘a single decision-making subject (the subject of theory) [… and] the possibility of a theoretical decision by a uniform “we” that predates a revolutionary moment.’ According to Kotouza, such a decision

'pre-empts' and 'reduces' 'the multiplicity of desires and conflicts that are unleashed in struggles.'

I agree that revolutionary practice cannot but transform theory. But to acknowledge the various ways in which struggle transforms theory is not to say that struggle suffices to determine theory. A theory born of struggle is not thereby rendered infallible. Experience is a corrective for theory, not its generative matrix. The claim that theory begins and ends in experience is empiricism. It assumes that experience speaks univocally and that its lessons are incontrovertible. But experience is equivocal and what it has to teach can only be crystallised through further theoretical effort. Kotouza observes that 'every theory takes a specific stance within struggles […] the question is how to discover the limits faced and possibilities produced in existing struggles, which are central to an analysis of the capital relation in this period.' With this too I concur. My point is only that the limits against which struggles abut, and the possibilities they produce, do not reveal themselves transparently within the horizon of an extant struggle; they need to be drawn out and articulated by means of a theoretical analysis capable of illuminating struggle without being blinkered by it.

However, to acknowledge theory's necessary responsiveness to struggle does not oblige us to accept as ineliminable 'the multiplicity of desires and conflicts unleashed in struggle'. Simply to affirm the irreducibility of conflictual multiplicity is to capitulate to a theoretical doxa (instituted by post-structuralism) that has long since become integral to neoliberal ideology. Instead of uncritically affirming the multiplicity of desires, we should ask: what are these desires desires for? To what extent are they symptoms of capitalist subjectivation? Is their conflict ineluctable? Or is their disparity not perhaps the common element out of which might be woven a communist subjectivity? Individual consciousness is a theatre of conflicting desires largely (although not exclusively) shaped by the impersonal circuitries of capital. If it is naïve to presuppose the unity of the revolutionary subject,

it is equally naïve to celebrate the agonism of desires as though it were a guarantor of emancipatory potency. Struggle unleashes a multiplicity of desires and conflicts but the expansion of struggle cannot be the extension of already existing desires and conflicts. It requires their integration such that all these desires and conflicts ultimately converge towards the abolition of the capital relation. This is not to say that a unitary horizon of integration can be stipulated in advance, merely to insist that the goal towards which communist theory and practice are oriented is the achievement of a unity-in-difference – or what Alain Badiou calls a generic multiplicity. That this unity is indiscernible from the vantage of the present does not render it unrealisable (what can be is a function of what is, which is not necessarily what we currently recognise). It is not given; it must be constructed. But the elements for its construction are precisely what is real, rather than imaginary, in these desires, and what is common, rather than exclusionary, among these conflicts.

Kotouza lays considerable emphasis on the fragmentary and indeterminate character of any contemporary affirmation of communism. The criticism of the present generated through struggle 'is negative (reaching levels of suicidalness) because the positivity of 'communist society' is today an unknown, the narrative that once led to it is defunct, and all we have is a limited criticism of the present through the practices of a fragmented proletariat with no ambition to unify or take power and manage anything at all.' But, she goes on, 'this lack of unity and of a future is fully material, and not an ideological falsity that can be cognitively defeated.' It is true that a positive vision of communism remains largely out of sight and that the paths traditionally taken to lead to it are no longer practicable. But to conclude from this that any positive characterisation of communism is a betrayal is to treat communism as an *agnostos theos* and communist theory as a *via negativa*. Theological transcendence is too impracticable to wield as a weapon against capital. We can positively characterise communism's logical form if not its qualitative content. The

complete delinking of negation from determination turns the necessary acknowledgement of communism's historical defeat into a prohibition on any vision of its future realisation. Just as absolute iconoclasm idolises the shattered image, abstract abolition becomes redemptive: a consolatory substitute for the determining exercise of negation in theory and practice. But to be a materialist is to refuse to fetishise shattered icons and to insist that nothing is redeemed by abolition. This is why the abolitions of wage labour, private property, and the state must be determinations as well as negations. And while materialism demands that we acknowledge proletarian fragmentation and the disintegration of revolutionary ambition (which have been trumpeted by reactionaries for decades), it does not require that we treat contingent historical defeats as though they were decrees from an absconded divinity. The point is to learn from the historical failures to achieve communism, not to embrace failure as the necessary chastisement for sinful hubris. The inference from 'lack of unity' to 'lack of a future' is idealist, not materialist.

By the same token, it is not clear why a struggle shaped entirely by the contours of what it rejects deserves to be called 'criticism'. Criticism of the wrong state of things prefigures in negative, through its ruthlessness, the right state of things; otherwise it is not criticism but lament. And however vehement, lament inexorably reinstates what has been as what should be. It fetishises a lost immediacy. Struggle unilluminated by prefiguration is not criticism; it is a reflex conditioned by and therefore bolstering what it is recoiling against. The unity of theory is the condition of prefiguration as what provides the horizon for thinking and acting; but this theoretical unity need not and does not guarantee the unity of the revolutionary subject which is its practical corollary. Thus Kotouza is completely right to insist that theory begins from the absence of a unified revolutionary subjectivity. Communist subjectivity is a result, not a precondition: 'Theory cannot presume a decision-making revolutionary unity, because the latter can only begin to be produced in the process of abolishing the

social divisions that fragment it.' The question then is how to situate the unity of theory in relation to the production of communist subjectivity on one hand and the abolition of social divisions on the other. Since materialist theory is the double articulation of thinking and acting, its unity does not exist independently of practice. From a materialist standpoint, theory, subjectivity, and practice are co-constitutive facets of a single dynamic process. Theory only achieves unity through the movement in which communist subjectivity is produced and social division is abolished. Thus the unity of theory is nothing but the coincidence of production and abolition. To recognise this is to refuse to abstract any moment from the process or subordinate the others to it. The unity of theory is not the precondition for subjectivity or practice; but nor do they provide the grounds for it. Materialist theory is nothing but productive abolition. Because theory is immanent to subjective practice, which is nothing but the exercise of theory, the practice of theory generates the immanent criteria through which the distinction between emancipatory and oppressive forms is exercised. This is not 'categorisation' according to pre-established theoretical criteria but cognitive discrimination in and through practice. Thus I disagree with Kotouza when she writes:

> The very premises of the question of categorising 'oppressive' and 'emancipatory' social forms and mediations are then mistaken. The question should instead become one of how objective and subjective relations and forms of being can transform and become other than, beyond, capitalist. This is a question of the process of a radical criticism of the present and of the possibility of overcoming the limits of who we are. It conceives of transformation through struggles and internal conflicts within them; not via the classification of the stuff of this world outside of the process that transforms it, and certainly not through looking in advance for something to preserve.

The refusal to discriminate between oppressive and emancipatory forms leads Kotouza to posit a pure transformative potential that is no longer mediated by capitalist social relations but simply characterised as the abstract 'overcoming' of all those objective and subjective determinations (both social and historical) that make us what we are. This potential for self-overcoming is invoked as a pre-existing power waiting to be unleashed by the cancellation of determining limits ('the limits of who we are'). But as such it remains an abstract subjective possibility, what Heidegger (a problematic precursor here) would call 'a pure potentiality to be', rather than a concrete material possibility harbouring determinate transformative power. Conceived as pure or indeterminate potentiality, the process that transforms the world, however subjectively conflictual, is not *of* this world. To insist that it is, then is to insist that the world must be made to participate in its own overcoming. This is theory as productive abolition, which is neither the expression of a pre-existing potential inscribed within the world, nor the miraculous upsurge of a subjective potency transcending the world. Theory becomes collectively transformative as the immanent discrimination of concrete universality in becoming. In this regard, Kotouza sees in my attempt to align universality with impersonality, impartiality, and objectivity an uncritical acceptance of the 'all too familiar principles of bourgeois legal judgement' that perpetuate the social relations reproduced by bourgeois law. The overcoming of capitalism, she claims, must be thought not only at the level of the impersonal but also of the personal: 'The 'personal', apart from a form of social power, also designates the social level at which the singularity of each person in their full material dimension, in their difference, can be recognised.' The problem here is not with the 'recognition' of singularity, for as Kotouza makes clear, 'the point is absolutely not a democratist prescription of "mutual recognition" in processes of struggle.' But if the 'democratist' conception of personal singularity rooted in mutual recognition is rejected without the elaboration of a dialectical alternative, the singularity

of persons remains a metaphysical abstraction rooted in theology, and the appeal to the 'material dimension' of individual 'difference' simply reiterates the ideology of individualism. The only thing that is 'material' about the singularity of persons is the fact that it is rooted in socioeconomic status and underwritten by the state. This equation of individuality with difference is of a piece with liberal ideology. Its resurgence here reveals how the merely abstract negation of the categories of bourgeois civil society unwittingly reinstates them.

Kotouza's subsequent characterisation of communism as a state of 'radical insecurity' and her account of the abolition of social categories as a process of radical 'self-redefinition' also reveals how, in the absence of objective mediation, the purely subjective abolition of capitalist social forms unwittingly converges with the neoliberal injunction to engage in a process of 'multiple' and 'open-ended' self-realisation under conditions of generalised socioeconomic precarity. Thus, Kotouza continues, the alternative to the rigidly impersonal conception of the universal and the 'democratist' ideology of mutual recognition is:

> the conception of communism as a state of radical insecurity, if the abolition of constraining social categories is to not merely reproduce the rigid liberal universality of 'man', but instead open up a process of radical self-redefinition as a dialectic between the universal and the particular. The process of recognition is never a neat one-off abstract classification but always under contestation of both recogniser (the social) and recognised. It also means that the meaning of 'human' is multiple and open-ended. This dialectic is impossible under a notion of universality that gives primacy to the impersonal and to the closure of objectivity.

I want to make three critical remarks here. First, for the billions of humans already existing in conditions of extreme material precarity, the characterisation of communism as a state of 'radical

insecurity' hardly sounds like a transformation. On the contrary, it makes it sound as if communism's only promise is the indefinite perpetuation of their current immiseration. The communism of indigence is the penitential fantasy of first-world leftists. Communism is about satisfying the material needs of the many despite the interests of the few, not about punishing the luxury of the few at the expense of the many. Since the resources for satisfying these needs – and many others besides – already exist, this means that the many are entitled to appropriate much more than the bare means of subsistence. Second, if communism entails 'radical self-redefinition', the 'self' at issue cannot be understood as a pre-existing singularity juxtaposed to the many, as it is in traditional metaphysical schemas. Only insofar as the social recogniser redefines itself in the recognised particular, and the recognised particular redefines itself in the social recogniser, can the process of self-redefinition be genuinely collective, rather than merely individual. The 'I' must recognise itself in the 'we' and the 'we' recognise itself in the 'I'. Third, insofar as this process of collective redefinition dissolves the traditional opposition of personal self to impersonal collectivity, it entails a new mode of existence, beyond the identifications of self, family, community, nation, and species, as well as the divisions of gender, race, and class. It is in this sense that the impersonal is a gateway to the universal. Only in this way can the parochialism of 'human' identity be overcome; not by pluralising and relativising the meaning of 'human', following the familiar strategy of liberal inclusiveness, but by superseding the opposition of identity and difference in the concrete universal. So long as the process of 'self-redefinition' remains anchored in the dialectic of recognised self and recognising collectivity, its 'open-endedness' remains bounded by the horizon of identification.

Communist subjectivity is the overcoming of this horizon by abolishing the identifications of class, race, gender, etc. But this self-abolition is only feasible if the agent of the abolition (act) is distinguished from the abolished self (content). It is

this distinction that defuses what I have called 'the paradox of self-abolition', which Kotouza (mistakenly) takes me to endorse: 'The paradox is of course only valid if we accept the logicisation of reality and subjectivity of which Brassier accuses Endnotes.' In fact, it is Endnotes who attribute this logicisation to capital and the paradox it seems to engender does not follow from the false equivalence between logical and real subsumption, which Endnotes rightly reject, but from the conflation of subjectivity with self-identity. My claim is that Endnotes can avoid this conflation, as well as the attendant paradox, by distinguishing abolishing subject from abolished self.[5] Kotouza seems to embrace something like this dissolution of the paradox. But she does so while continuing to equate subjective struggle with a potential self-transformation and in doing so she hypostasises subjectivity as the abstract overcoming of self-identity:

> [I]f proletarians abolish 'proletarian' as a material social category, if they abolish the class relation, they are no longer proletarians: women are no longer women – their bodily difference has no oppressive social significance – 'blacks' are no longer 'blacks' and so on. They produce themselves as something else that is both singular and universal, creating the possibility of self-definition and of the re-definition of what is human, inventing new ways of relating to one another and to the world. It is the something else this abolition produces, the de-subjectification which objectively overcomes the limit of what one is, that the paradox seems to rule out. *This, however, is the conception of a potential transformation, not the application of a logical necessity*. *The concept of self-abolition is conceivable not as a logical unfolding but as a potential that we can decipher in the present historical conjuncture because of the impossibility of class self-affirmation* [my emphasis RB]. We could of course be proven entirely wrong.

It is to Kotouza's credit that she acknowledges the obstacles standing in the way of such a realisation. But the difficulty is arguably more fundamental. By itself, the impossibility of class self-affirmation does not suffice to anchor this potential in the present historical conjuncture. A real gap separates the actuality of this objective impossibility from the actualisation of this subjective potential. Communism's 'real movement' has split: it has forked into the real gap between objective forces and subjective potential.

2. The Production of History

If communism is no longer the forward march of history, it can no longer assume the mantle of modernity. This has become a critical commonplace. Thus Kotouza refuses any connection between it and the 'progressive' institutions of modernity (reduction of the working day, universal suffrage, health care, gender equality, automation, etc.). By the same token, she rejects any attempt to locate a hidden emancipatory element in the present:

> The warnings against 'the repudiation of modernity' and 'cancelling the emancipatory potentials latent in technologies' can be seen as attached to a conservative interpretation of the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*. This is the idea that the overcoming of capitalism is not a total transformation, a negation of everything that exists so that something new might emerge, which will, inevitably, contain radically altered elements of the old world; rather, this overcoming must necessarily leave intact the 'progressive' elements latent within capitalism, because it is those elements that point towards its overcoming. Despite Marx's best insights on historical determination only being applicable retrospectively, this approach wishes to locate the future in the present instead of producing it from the premises of the present.

Correctly understood, it is precisely sublation that entails that historical determination is only applicable retrospectively. However,

this does nothing to substantiate Kotouza's closing distinction, which seems to be purely verbal. If the future is 'produced from the premises of the present' without being 'locatable' in the present this is precisely because its premises *are* locatable within the present. Otherwise, what would it mean to call them its premises and how could they serve to produce it? Surely no programmatist ever claimed that the future is *already* in the present such that it does not need to be produced. The Marxist claim about the 'real movement' is precisely the insistence that the movement of things is irreducible to the movement of ideas, such that the production of the future not be confused with utopian futurism. Proponents of communisation see an objective index of the real movement in the expulsion of an ever-increasing surplus population from the process of value-creation. On Kotouza's account, the subjective realisation of this movement unfolds as a self-overcoming that is not determined in return by the socially mediated determinations of the self. To reinstate a co-dependence between the movement of overcoming and the determinations that are overcome would be to tie communism back to the social institutions of modernity. Abolition would collapse back into *Aufhebung*. To the extent that she rejects any such interdependence between the act of overcoming and the content that is overcome, Kotouza cannot but hypostasise the movement of overcoming as a purely subjective transcendence. The real gap between communism's possibility and its reality has to be filled in by endowing subjectivity with the power to transcend objective determination. This is to subjectivise the premises for the production of the future. Since they are no longer objectively locatable, whether in the determinations of class, the institutions of modernity, or the resources of technology, they too can only be subjectively identified through struggles:

> We have to produce theory based on the struggles that take place today, when the notion of communism as progress has lost all social validity. The failure of past revolutions, the decline of the workers' movement, the failure of social

> movements to make any significant gains in the past 40 years that would add up to a unifying 'dynamic' have killed off any delusion that history is on the side of proletarians. History has to be produced, everything has to be reconsidered.

It is certainly true that theory cannot deliver certainty of victory, especially not given the disappearance of any recognisable historical guarantors for the overcoming of capitalism. But a theory entirely subordinated to the vicissitudes of subjective agonism cannot even assume the practical possibility of transformation; it can only hope for its indeterminate advent, whether catastrophic or messianic. Moreover, if we cannot objectively determine the extent to which such an advent reconfigures the horizon of possibility, how could we even act upon it? Practical possibilities are rooted in material affordances. While it is certainly important to acknowledge how ideology misrepresents or occludes affordances, there must be some objective criterion for discerning occluded possibilities, otherwise how can we even talk of possibilities? A politics that relinquishes the possible either embraces the fatalistic foreclosure of transformation[6] or maintains transformation as a vacuous possibility, which is the transubstantiation of incapacity: we no longer know how to change the world, or even how it could change, yet we continue to hope that it will. This is an ethics of struggle negatively mirroring the certainties of programmatism. But a struggle that has already foreclosed the possibility of victory is not a struggle: it is the spasm of the condemned.

3. The Problem of Repurposing

The identification of material points of leverage for interventions that might precipitate change presupposes some sort of objective understanding. Moreover, the only actually existing points of leverage are currently embedded within capitalist modernity. Kotouza rejects the claim that communism is the realisation of modernity.[7] And indeed, to claim that it is would be to revert to a teleological interpretation of sublation that crudely traduces the

historical dialectic. But the point is that modernity provides the material for the possibility of communism, not that the latter is the completion of the former. Thus when Kotouza writes:

> the attachment to modernity must be criticised: not as a corruption of the idealised human community, but as a fetishism that objectifies and eternalises capitalist expansion, commodities, capitalist technology, knowledge and institutions, blind to the social mediations from which these are inseparable: the world-scale management and enforcement of exploitative social relations, and all the ensuing suffering and death.

She assumes that to acknowledge modernity as the material for communism is to be blind to the destructive nature of capitalist expansion and the oppressive social mediations with which it is bound up. But this simply does not follow. It confuses the claim that modernity provides the only available social material from which communism can be constructed with the claim that communism is the realisation of potentialities already actual in capitalism. Capital accumulation and exploitative social relations must be abolished, but the materials from whence this abolition proceeds are the commodities, technologies, knowledges, and institutions of capitalism. What else could be the starting point?

Capitalist modernity is not an attachment but an ineluctable condition. So we must ask: what does it mean to affirm a sociality untainted by *any* of the mediations characteristic of capitalism? Either we appeal to a lost immediacy or we evoke mediations that are not the result of capitalism. Kotouza recognises this problem but does not offer any solutions:

> If social unity is to be founded on complex global-scale production, and if such production is to continue functioning with today's effectiveness, this would require a complex and hierarchical division of labour, which presupposes

> social divisions, as well as a centralised power that would ensure that things function, that everyone who is able to 'contributes to society' by working and everyone is 'fairly' remunerated. Beyond the difficult problem of mediation (what would be the measure of 'fairness' here, and what form will remuneration take if not that of money?) there is also the question of social management as a potential form of oppression.

I agree that the specialisation of management is a potential source of oppression. But it is so to a much greater degree than social management per se, which need not entail a rigid division of labour and fixed specialisation. So it is important not to slip from suspecting the specialisation of social management to suspecting social management per se. I do not think Kotouza commits this slippage. But the questions she raises are difficult. Is all division hierarchical? Is every form of social management suspect because it is a potential source of oppression? (Waste disposal? Sanitation? Social housing?) The suspicion of social management betrays the unspoken conviction that sociality itself is oppressive. But what prospect then for a communist society? To predicate the realisation of communism on a set of social mediations that bear no relation whatsoever to actually existing capitalist mediations is to reduce communism to a wholly indeterminate ideal. The retort that determination can only be achieved through struggles is unconvincing: struggles are both determined and determining and invariably generate as many problems as they resolve. Unless one can specify how struggles could give rise to practices that mediate social relations without reinstating any real abstractions (not just the real abstractions of capital, such as money and abstract labour), the communist alternative to capitalist society evaporates into a plea for an idealised human community. The distinction between logical form and qualitative content is relevant here: what would mediations that are not generated by real abstraction be? Is every social synthesis generative of real abstraction? The

denunciation of abstract domination implies an account of alternative forms of social synthesis; without this it becomes an empiricist condemnation of abstraction in the name of the fetishised concretion of a community without mediation. The latter is an abstraction more oppressive than any real abstraction of capitalism.

If the technologies of capitalist modernity are enveloped by social mediations that enforce the abstract domination of value then abolishing this domination requires constructing a new social synthesis. But if the realisation of a new synthesis is the precondition for non-oppressive technologies, then capitalist technology cannot be repurposed: any attempt to repurpose it merely perpetuates capitalist domination. This is a consequence Kotouza seems willing to embrace:

> [W]hy should we assume today that, in the future, survival from illness would have to involve medicine as it exists today? […] It is […] impossible to extricate 'function' from its system of production, the complex, oppressively hierarchical divisions of labour and power relations on which today depend the production of medical knowledge as well as the commodities based on it. The use-value this argument attempts to extract as an 'emancipatory potential' from within capitalist commodities does not exist as a mere mechanical or biological functionality that can be separated from the social, the capitalist mode of relating in the process of its production and consumption, even less so from its subjection to exchange-value [….] Taken as far as it can go, this critique of use-value is the condition of possibility for the production of new forms of knowledge or technology, which are not guided by value but by an entirely different logic of relating.

How might one respond? The emancipatory potential of modern technology does not exist as a mechanical or biological functionality – it is not actual in that sense – rather, it exists as a potential

but currently unrecognised function whose actualisation presupposes the construction of a new social relation. Thus my suggestion is not that technology itself harbours emancipatory potential but that its actual function (or use-value) does not exclude other possible modes of functioning in the construction of new social relations. But to claim, as Kotouza does, that the utility of modern medicine is circumscribed by and reproductive of capitalist social relations commits one to giving an account of what this 'entirely different' logic of relating might be. Otherwise, talk of the production of new forms of knowledge and technology remains empty, precisely because such knowledges and technologies are strictly inconceivable within the capital relation. Indeed, how could they even be called 'knowledges' or 'technologies'? Since knowledge and technology as we know them are guided by value, the abolition of value entails the abolition of knowledge and technology as we know them. This is the price of Kotouza's insistence that cognitive norms and technological functions are *entirely* circumscribed by a logic of relating subordinated to value. Nothing of the world as we know it can remain after the abolition of value. Thus it is not clear what Kotouza means when she writes that the transformed world will nevertheless 'contain radically altered elements of the old world.' Alteration is only intelligible against some background continuity; absolute alterity is unintelligible because it is effectively unrecognisable and therefore indiscernible from sameness. An alteration so radical as to alter the very form of its recognition is the same as one that leaves everything as it is. Kotouza de-absolutises capitalist domination by absolutising struggle as indomitable resistance. But how does one abolish a world if using any part of it in that abolition perpetuates it?

1

See Dimitra Kotouza ‘Keepsakes: A Response to Ray Brassier’, pp.464–483 in this book.

2

I am grateful to Mikkel Ibsen for clarifying this point to me in conversation.

3

It will not do to dismiss the distinction between subjective and objective as a relic of subject-object dualism: it is an indispensable resource for dialectical analysis. Its rejection, along with dialectics, is an unthinking reflex programmed by post-structuralist doxa. Indeed, much of what is proclaimed as ‘anti-dualism’ in contemporary theory is in fact unbridled subjectivism.

4

We should be clear about what an absolute or unmediated abolition of capitalism means. To the extent that every single facet of contemporary human existence is enveloped by capitalist social relations (even if not directly subsumed by value), the immediate abolition of those relations entails the complete elimination of everything in which those relations are encapsulated: not just money and wage-labour, but *all* the products and technologies associated with industrial manufacture, including agriculture, food, transport, medicine, housing, communication, energy, etc. For a particularly acute analysis of this quandary, see Rob Lucas ‘Feeding the Infant’, pp.273-298 in this book. See also Endnotes ‘False Totalities Don’t Have Exits’ in Arts Against Cuts, *Bad Feelings*, London: Bookworks, 2015, n.p., pp.504–518 in this book.

5

See my ‘Wandering Abstraction: Acceleration, Communization, and Real Movement’, pp.215–240 in this book, originally published in Mute, 13 February 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abstraction

6

Though this is not to say that fatalism is necessarily reactionary: see Frank Ruda’s *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

7

Kotouza writes, ‘If there is a problem with a dialectic of alienation that prescribes a reunification with an idealised nature and a naturalised, a-historical humanity, this cannot be overcome by the rehabilitation of a concept of modernity that merely needs to be unfettered from the corrupting domination of value in order to become true to itself. History is not produced ex-nihilo, but it is also not a ‘realisation’ of a pre-existing element, whether that is conceived as natural or historically determined. History can only be narrativised as some kind of ‘realisation’ retrospectively.’ p.472.

False Totalities Don't Have Exits: Introduction to Error

—

by Endnotes

This text was initially part of a presentation of the Endnotes text 'Error' at the 'What is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?' workshop at Bulegoa z/b, Bilbao, 2014. An early draft of the text was published in Arts Against Cuts' book *Bad Feelings* (2015). This version is a composite of the introduction to that presentation and the text published in *Bad Feelings*.

The following is a fragment from a work in progress that was intended to appear in *Endnotes* No.4[1]. It's a strange and perhaps difficult text, and one that we fear will be prone to misinterpretation. The core intention here is to identify and critique fundamental conceptual structures that are latent in revolutionary thinking – structures that set the terms of certain recurrent disputes around such thinking. These structures are most explicit in formalised theory, but are also, we think, implicit in the everyday 'common sense' of struggles. The point of such critique is not simply to transcend such structures, since this may not actually be possible: despite their limits, these structures have a certain necessity. As such, one might view this as a somewhat 'Kantian' project, though the theoretical sensibility at play here generally owes more to Hegel.

The project can be framed narrowly as responding to a standard genre of critique of Endnotes that we find exemplified in articles by Alberto Toscano, in a muddled piece from Matthijs Krul and, in the subtlest example so far, Ray Brassier's 'Wandering Abstraction' (pages 215–240 in this book). Recently this genre has been entangled with debates around a supposed competing brand of radical intellectual chic, a rival fad-word to set against 'communisation theory': 'accelerationism'. Plainly put, at the core of this genre is the 'what do we do with all the stuff?' question; a question to which there are apparently four possible answers: (a) smash it up, (b) keep it, (c) change it, and (d) some mixture of answers a-c. In the rhetorical game which ensues around this question, 'communisation theory' will inevitably be placed at (a), its most naïve leftist critics at (b), while those who want to appear right-thinking and pragmatic will place themselves at (c), or perhaps (d). Narrowly, this text can be viewed as a critique of this game, which naturally involves a refusal to accept any placing of Endnotes at (a), but is also intended to problematise the idea that any alternative allocation on this game's board is an adequate response.

But, beyond the terms of that debate, the text is also meant to address broader fundamental problems in thinking about

the notion of revolutionary rupture. The key determinant here is the concept of totality employed in identifying that which is to be abolished. Some notion of totality is unavoidable, but any such notion seems necessarily to raise a set of irresolvable metaphysical problems. With adequate critical self-reflection, these problems can at least be negotiated as long as the concept of totality with which we are operating is a determinate one, in which not only the unity of all moments, but also their systematic differentiation from each other, can be clearly articulated.

The Marxist notion of a capitalist mode of production is an example of such a determinate totality. But there is often a slide from this determinate notion to another one, where the whole that is to be superseded is posited as a sort of indeterminate 'absolute', underlying and saturating every particular of our problematic. When this occurs, those metaphysical problems become monstrous, condemning us to the infinite working-through of variants of traditional theological problematics, searching for an 'exit' where there can be none. We call the projection of such totalities 'false totalisation', since the projected totality is contentless, an indeterminate 'all' involving no real articulation of its moments.

Thinking which confuses capital's domination of the world at large, and its possession of the apparatuses of human reproduction, with a generalised logico-ontological 'subsumption' of all particulars, tends to be entwined with a false totalisation, and for this reason in particular is to be criticised. The determinate totality which is the capitalist mode of production does not, and will never, saturate the entire human world, let alone the natural one. But it does possess human reproductive apparatuses in general, at a planetary level. And it follows from this that our very being will be at stake in any supersession of the capitalist mode of production.

As to the concept of 'error' that titles this text, we have yet to work this through with enough precision for it to be worthy of debate, but it can be said provisionally at least that it is derived from the technical notions of error at play in the strange ontology

of statistics, and in engineering, where it represents not a mere mistake, but an *objective disparity*. It is intended on the one hand as a sort of negative identification of the gulf between particular practices that are materialised within the stuff of capitalist societies, and a communist refiguring of human practice in general, and on the other hand as an identification of the objective disparity between real processes of revolutionary change and our capacity to conceptualise them. These two disparities are closely related. We will end this introduction with a few rough propositions that have not yet been adequately developed in the fragment below, but which might prove fodder for debate this weekend:

Proposition 1:

Projective imaginings of both a general managed transition beyond capitalism – in which a singular thread of decision applies globally – and a singular, spontaneous, insurrectionary break with it, are effects of the conceptual artefacts necessarily produced by the impossibility of consistently or adequately thinking through the end of a totality. Both are equally the offspring of unavoidable but inadequate abstractions. There's thus little point in arguing over which one is the better.

Proposition 2:

If both above projections are structurally constrained to being mere fantasies, this basic conceptual problem is only compounded by historical conditions in which there exists no significant ready-constituted social subject with the overcoming of the mode of production as its notional goal. The absence of such a subject underlines the fact that seemingly common sense, pragmatic ideas about a globally planned transition are just as fantastical as their ostensible alternatives.

Proposition 3:

This, of course, doesn't mean we should think that a revolution will have to happen 'by accident'.

Proposition 4:

If neither process nor event can adequately capture what the end of a totality would look like, nor will forging some mere conceptual admixture of the two ultimately solve the problem, since concepts are immiscible.[2] This is equally true of origin.

Proposition 5:

The impossibility of adequately thinking this problem through on the basis of mere concepts should not be mistaken for a concrete impossibility. The origin of the capitalist mode of production was impossible in a similar way, yet it still happened. In current global conditions, with ecological crisis, spluttering economies and a mounting surplus population, it is more necessary than ever to contemplate the end of the capitalist mode of production.

Error

In a world whose social forms are shaped by capital, it is perhaps to capital that we should look for explanation of the material imprints and patterns left by those forms – not just in the production process itself, but also in all the implications of this process as it unfolds across the globe. If capital moulds social relations to its ends and means, those relations in turn mould the stuff of the world. And if the affordances of that stuff enable and limit our activity, our own capacities must thus be seen as in part defined by capital. From this there follows a conundrum in the communist imaginary: absent the constitutive social forms of capitalist society, what will people do about all the stuff of the capitalist world and the parameters it gives to their action and behaviour? How will they be able to work with these things to reproduce themselves, without being compelled to reverse engineer the social relations that have inscribed themselves in them? This intractable question invites two troublesome answers. Either:

1. Given the depth of penetration of the effects of capital into the very material structure of the world, it will be necessary to break directly with the entire structure of things as

given, since anything less than this will amount to a perpetuation or return of capitalist social relations. Or,
2. Given the general human dependence on capitalist infrastructure, it will be necessary to take a pragmatic approach, keeping this infrastructure running while we grapple with the Herculean political problem of managing and coordinating some global transitional phase.

From the standpoint of the first answer it will be said in response to the second: keeping such infrastructure running would be tantamount to keeping capitalism in general running, since such things cannot be extricated from the global capitalist system. And from the standpoint of the second it will be said in response to the first: to advocate some immediate break with the material structure of the capitalist world in general is to advocate a gigantic global humanitarian disaster, since there are no other ready means for dealing with the needs of seven billion people.

These contrary standpoints, for all the difference between a homely common sense and a rigorous principle, have at least one common implication: insofar as the future is foreseeable on the basis of things as currently given, it is capitalism or else. If the affordances of the world are shaped by the imprint of capital, this currently gives and forecloses the horizon. Thus, at the limit of Hercules' labours there's still an inscription that says *nec plus ultra:* nothing else beyond but an ineffable negativity. And whether they liked it or not, our intransigents, for their part, would quickly be confronted with all the pragmatic problems of carving some path through all this crud. If the capital-constrained vectors written into the stuff of the world lead indefinitely towards the horizon, communism must be projected as an indeterminate, far-off break in these vectors. And as to the exact placement or character of that break: infinitesimals of sectarian fun await those who try to take up a strict position – or consign some opponent to one – on such matters.

If we squint our eyes this problematic resembles another – the one with which Marx grapples in the section of *Capital* on 'so-called primitive accumulation.' Given that capital is a systematic inter-relation of moments which posits its preconditions as a primary result, this confronts us with a question: how could such a thing originate in the first place? This is an instance of the problem of bridging the gulf between any synchronic theory and a diachronic account of the same totality – or, more broadly, of the ancient and intractable philosophical problem of how to think becoming. Considered synchronically, given that all moments of the totality are simultaneously necessary, in all their systematic relations, the problem of origin appears absolute: capital must have sprung fully formed into the world, and it can't have existed at all a mere instant prior to this. But considered in diachronic terms this claim appears irrational: though little moments of genesis are part of the overall continuity of things, historical development doesn't produce miracles. Marx avoids this problem by reducing the question to that of the historical separation of producers from the means of production – something for which a history can be narrated, and which the synchronic analysis has demonstrated to be a fundamental prerequisite for generalised capitalist production.

In strict theoretical terms, however, this move is inadequate, since it only sidesteps the question of the origin of the system of forms of value that mediate the separated relation of producers and means of production. This separation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the capitalist mode of production. Thus, we can ask whether a different – non-capitalist – mode of production might have been possible on the basis of this simple separation if, for example, capital's self-valorisation had been absent as motive force. However, rather than getting caught up in such speculation, we might provisionally bracket this problem as merely an unavoidable theoretical artefact of a nonetheless necessary distinction. We know, after all, that capitalism did come to be, and Marx's account of this history is a plausible one. To push

further on the problem might look like philosophical onanism – and, of course, it's better to attend to the actual world.

But if, on the basis of a synchronic grasp of capital as totality, the origin presents itself as a problem, or historically as a sort of 'miracle', something similar is true of capital's demise. On the strict basis of capital's systemic integrity, its demise is unthinkable, and thus, when postulated, tends to take the abstract form of a pure rupture. And there results a strong temptation to recoil from this thought into assuming instead the concrete impossibility of anything so absolute, anything so mystical: of course, some intermediate phase must be postulated and the purity of such a rupture diminished; more pragmatic steps must be taken... Yet no amount of common-sense transitioning can bridge from what is to what is not without still implicitly posing the problem of when specifically the break takes place – the problem, if framed in this way, does not go away. The theoretical effects of the synchronic/diachronic distinction appear again, now resembling one of Zeno's paradoxes.

So, again, we might bracket such matters as theoretical artefacts, and as not necessarily referring to any literal historical truth, much as the axiomatic projection of a single infinite flat plane can occur as an artefact of Euclidean geometry without rendering that geometry useless in the face of the non-flatness of the world. And let's try to resist pictorialising this necessarily abstract concept of a pure final rupture in the concrete world of our revolutionary imaginary, for the resulting visions are guaranteed to be facile, simply depicting this abstractness. Against such imaginings, the common-sense recoil to faith in 'transition' is understandable. Yet it will always be susceptible to the impertinent prodding of a theoretical absolutism which correctly perceives that, in itself, no amount of transition can amount to a rupture.

A Rube Goldberg Contraption

Now, let's recall that capital itself was the only totality at stake in all that questioning; not yet even capitalist society, let alone the things that bear the imprint of that society. If the simple question

of thinking capital's demise on the basis of its systemic integrity leads us into metaphysical conundrums (a problem that no amount of crisis theory can solve of its own accord), it would seem reasonable to reframe the question on other bases, such that we no longer assume the very thing we want to negate. If capital's totality is restrictable to the various phases in its circuit, there's surely plenty else out there that we depend upon: can't we plant our feet in 'nature' or 'the commons' or 'the autonomy of the working class' or 'humanity', from whence we can swivel our analytical instruments and look at capital from the outside as something subject to forces other than itself? From here it looks all artifice. How could we have been so foolish as to start from a position whose assumption was the eternalisation of the very thing whose demise we wanted to think?

So we marshal all our forces – nature, the commons, the autonomy of the working class, humanity, etc. A mere mode of production can never be a match for such a formidable army. But it's impossible to form battle lines when both antagonists are spread all over the place. What's more, the capitalist side is running the other's logistics... Particularistic and contingent as this totality may look – when measured up against the empty universality of such bald abstractions – if we are to take a realist survey of the forces at play, we're compelled to note that this mode of production is necessary for the reproduction of such antagonists as it meets. And thus it is easily master of the entire strategic terrain. This mere mode of production has miraculously made itself once more into the Absolute of this problematic: from the perspective of action it fills the whole horizon, and communism has been reduced again to an abstract messianism.

Thus, our world appears capitalist through-and-through. We can now apply a philosophical lacquer to our new-found realism; a viscous solution of such things as 'reification' and 'subsumption', as is the wont of a particular kind of philosophically oriented Marxism which can be traced back at least as far as Lukács's reification essay. This type of Marxism revels

intellectually in projecting some subsumption of the world, without remainder, into a monolithic totality, of which the essence is capital or one of its avatars. Since all is tendentially subsumed in this totality, our elementary philosophical problem of thinking becoming now takes on grander proportions – for no particularisation of a totality is conceivable when it is absolute, projected across the breadth of social being and into the depths of its material imprints. Thus, revolutionary thinking is faced with a version of a theological problematic: immanence vs. transcendence. If communism is immanently produced within a capitalist world, how is it not to be just a perpetuation of capitalism? If communism transcends this world, how are we to get there, given the depth of our subsumption within capitalism? It is necessary to think the impossible passing-over of a limit, the working-through of a contradiction: immanent transcendence. It's a seductive problem that lends itself to no end of forlorn and playful manipulation. But even play gets boring eventually, and boredom is a mode of critique.

So let's retrace our steps to the beginning, and throw our thoughts again speculatively at the crud of the world. The application in which I write this is developed by volunteers. Within sight, there's a garden on wasteland reclaimed by local residents. The route that leads north-south from here has connected not just capitalist conurbations, but also medieval towns and hamlets. The kinds of vessels whose shards litter deep layers of the earth are still currently in use, with the same affordances. The spaces between these words were invented by feudal scribes. To the north, the woodless hills that roll either side were not cleared by capital, but by neolithic people. If capital is the motive factor in shaping social forms which in turn leave their imprint on all the stuff of the world, we would of course be distinctly overestimating its spread and power if we really thought that there was nothing here that was not referable to – and explicable in terms of – capital. To theoretically project capital's totalisation beyond what capital can legitimately explain is to make a false – merely imaginary

– totalisation. The crud of the world, with its limits and affordances, extends far beyond capital's horizon.

Poor Miserable Heath Robinson

Yet there's a truth pictorialised in such false totalisations. While it doesn't encompass all the world's stuff, capital's self-totalisation involves an inner tendency towards expansion, and the value form it autonomises projects itself as the potential universal to all the world's particulars. Capital thus makes a claim – however spuriously – to logical universality, while it subordinates one aspect of social reproduction after another to its prerogatives. Most importantly, in this process it posits a tendentially general proletarian 'we', with everything at stake in this reproduction. This we, whose being is immanent to the capitalist mode of production, is only insofar as capital mediates its reproduction, putting it logically at stake in any overcoming of capital itself. It is never in a state of absolute identity with the creatures it subsumes – they'll always dwell in the crud of the world prior to inhabiting capitalist society – but insofar as capital mediates their reproduction, these creatures are posited as proletarians. This seizing-hold of social reproduction by capital, and this positing of a class for whom everything is at stake in this reproduction, is the real generalisation of the proletariat. Through this process, capital takes the lives of an expanding mass of humanity under its uncertain stewardship, generalising the stakes held in a capital-mediated social reproduction. At the same time, it has a tendency to corrode such reciprocality as there is in these bonds, throwing workers into ever more dependent conditions and insecurity. And as it does so, while the stakes are raised, the odds simultaneously lengthen. Thus, a whole shape of life comes to be put precariously in question.

Meanwhile, integrative processes inherent to political-economic and technical levels tie this reproduction increasingly into a unified and globally articulated system. Practical-technical vectors written into the stuff of the world gradually lose much of the 'ready-to-hand'-ness appropriate to the

Robinson-like practical individual, as their globality lends them an ineffable quality, always receding over the horizon of that individual's perception. 'My' actions are decreasingly encapsulable as complete or self-subsistent, meaningful in themselves, deferring vanishingly instead down a chain of other actions.

Now the 'state of nature' of the communist imaginary looks ever more remote from that of the Lockean practical type, while Rousseauian and Hobbesian terms lose sense: abstracted from this vast reproductive apparatus the human can be reduced neither to an ignoble, primordial state of violence nor to some precorrupted condition, but only to inanimate matter. A breakdown of capitalist reproduction becomes imaginable only as a breakdown of human reproduction per se, and the communist imaginary increasingly a mere blank negativity, its most concrete forms mirroring the emptiest, merely logical derivation from the theoretical artefacts we examined above. Now the most abstract anarchisms become the common sense of struggles, while social democracy whiffs of utopia.

It would be a strange thing to advocate wilfully either for that blank negativity, or for its simple, pragmatic management as we cling on to this apparatus for dear life; and there is no obvious mediating path. Besides, at this large scale, though we are never passive, there's little straightforward choice that comes into such matters. Yet the odds continue to lengthen while the stakes are raised. And thus at some point, we can reasonably speculate, the bulk of humanity will have to find another way of reproducing itself. It is inconceivable that it could do this instantaneously, or acting merely under the most abstract kind of spontaneity. It is also inconceivable that it could simply cut the cable on its capitalist life support and head back into some rusticating bliss. However abstractly this negation presents itself on the horizon, the course of any real revolutionary struggle to escape this bind will of course be entirely concrete; rich in articulations, coordinations, mediations. And while it would be vain to think we could draw up detailed blueprints in advance, it would also be absurd

to advocate for mere passivity. So in the meantime we struggle as well as we can, and in the process we strain to trace the strategic logic of things, to map the crud of the world from where we stand, and to reflect that back into the struggles themselves.

Tangent Space

So what will we do with all the crud of the world? The question does not stop asking itself. But it would be quixotic to think that we could answer it right away from some merely contemplative position, sorting all this shit into the columns of a communiser's inventory: keeps, junks, repurposes. There is stuff with regards to which it would be pointless to speculate as to the capitalist-ness or otherwise of its affordances, and there's stuff that would be of strategic significance in any revolutionary struggle. Yet the latter is precisely the kind that is most inextricably entwined with the global reproductive apparatus; it can't be disaggregated and evaluated in abstraction from that apparatus, and the problem it poses can't be resolved into a keeping or a junking. 'Repurposing' is probably closest to what people would find a need to do, but it's also the vaguest of these terms, and hardly an answer at all to a question which can only be posed properly in practice.

It would be a case of false totalisation to take all this stuff to be irredeemably capitalist: social forms cannot be identified with the crud of the world. But we also can't assume that such stuff could be freed from those forms and their uses, capitalist operators swapped for communist ones. Imaginings of some universal managed resolution to 'the infrastructure question' are as much effects of our second theoretical artefact as are insurrectionist fantasies.

Historical experience will never embody such abstractions. While capital remains to be at some point brought to a revolutionary terminus, from this angle we can't judge with any precision what might be the key moment. But it is reasonable to speculate that the infrastructure question would loom large: concretely, practically, irreducible in its complexity.

For all the abstractness of communism as it presents itself, it's still there, projected onto the horizon by a class relation which can only *be* insofar as it is coming to an end. Against the glare of this blank abstraction, the crud that clutters the terrain stands out in silhouette. It's impossible to say precisely how we will get there, or how long it will take: as we approach it, the horizon rolls back. But it's not always the same distance away: even if our steps have always fallen short until now, sometimes a steep gradient seems to bring it right up to our noses. And we might at least capture the falling-short with a concept: error. A cognate of the verb 'to err', error refers to a straying, a mistake, a lapse. Thus, it is always a relation between two points at minimum: something right, and something which deviates from it. In statistics, an error term may identify the influence of an unmeasured world beyond our model. And in mathematics, when an exact value can only be ascertained at infinity, specifiable error margins can at least define our proximity to that value. In engineering, error is the gap between a norm of how things should function, and how they actually do. In instances of error, our means fall short of the ends we project, and the error we confront names this lack of possibility.

The delimitation of error is a key aspect of the everyday practical world; a negative specification of the space of affordances in which particular ends may be pursued. In a fragile, interlocked world whose affordances are increasingly defined by the humourless literality of logic gates, you don't have to stray far from the pregiven cowpaths to bump into error. Indeed, as soon as one attempts something not given by the affordances of the world, the state of error – as a measure of incapacity – appears absolute. But with reconstructive effort, error may gradually be pushed back to the limits, defining a space of possibility.

As lived activity errs from the vectors shaped by capital's worldly movement, new paths will already be being trodden, new uses found for existing things, old uses be taking new tools. Communist use, we might say, is repressed by capitalist crud, hemmed in as error. Incapacity would be the immediate condition

faced by many of those erring from the affordances written into the most intricate of capitalist infrastructures. But in running up against that incapacity, lived activity will have to find ways to push the error back, carve out new affordances, such that erring becomes the path, and capitalist use becomes the error.

1

Though the full version was scheduled for *Endnotes* No.4, the mass of other content meant it was held over for *Endnotes* No.5, which was supposed to follow shortly after. In the event, that volume did not reach the printers until 2019, making for a peculiarly long gestation. The core idea of the text remained essentially unchanged throughout, though we shifted emphasis from 'false' to 'indeterminate' totalities, on the basis that the true/false dichotomy was confusing: totalities that are indeterminate might be still be 'true' in some sense. For example, 'society' is an indeterminate totality, since we cannot systematically and exhaustively enumerate its constituent mediations, but it is no less real, and indeed thinking of it as an indeterminate whole may actually be somewhat appropriate. As such, the indeterminate totality need not represent a mere *mistake*. What does stand to be critically interrogated is the way thought slides between determinate and indeterminate totalities, often blurring the two, and the impact that this has on revolutionary speculation. Try imagining revolution as an exit from *society*: while some ultra-radical contrarians will of course try to do just that, the challenge for them will be to imbue such thinking with definite content.

2

That is to say: concepts can only meaningfully be brought together by further mediating terms which identify their relations while allowing them to retain their distinctness.

Wealthy, healthy. Ruddy cheeks
I notice in the mirror. I rub
my index finger on the blush
powder which sits inside a turquoise
shell. Silently. For some reason,
that is to say, some function of time with respect
to this space, I do not
make a sound. Not one sound.
To groan is to admit.
Admit what? That you are wrong.
About what? You know, just in general.
What? Your body, dummy. Your body's wrong.

<>

Bodies, of course, are not wrong.
Whereas, wrong is mostly body.

<>

Appendix

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank the contributors to the book for their patience and persistent support throughout the process of its making. They also thank Loty Negarti and Bulegoa z/b as well as all those who attended and contributed to the reading group and workshop in 2014 in Bilbao. They would also like to thank Paweł Nowożycki, Meagan Down and Sebastian Cichocki of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and Mikołaj Ratajczak (*Praktyka Teoretyczna*), Cuadernos de negación, Themis Katsoulis, Howard Slater, Rosemary Grennan and MayDay Rooms, Kaya Behkalam and Künstlerhof Frohnau, Michael Heinrich, Sami Khatib, Jacques Camatte, Carlos Prieto, Kolitza, Karim Mebarkia, Farahnaz Hatam and Colin Hacklander (LABOUR), Beata "Bobo" Bąk, Edyta Jarząb, John Nzoka, Sylwia "Ruda" Żołądkiewicz, Pablo Marte, Daniel Llária, David Bremner, Iñigo Eguillor, Maria Gorosarri, Sandro Brito Rojas, Mario Aguiriano, Noah Brehmer, Michele Masucci, Tim Savage and the Estate of Sean Bonney.

Contributors

Sean Bonney (1969–2019) performed his work at protests, in occupations, in seminar rooms, on picket lines, in the back rooms of pubs and at international poetry festivals. His poetry has been translated into several languages. His books of poetry include *Happiness: Poems after Rimbaud*, *The Commons*, *Baudelaire in English*, *Document: Poems, Diagrams, Manifestos July 7th 2005 – June 27th 2007*, *Letters Against the Firmament* and *Our Death*.

Nadia Bou Ali is Associate Professor and Director of the Civilization Studies Program at the American University of Beirut. She is the author of *Hall of Mirrors: Psychoanalysis and the Love of Arabic* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), co-editor (with Rohit Goel) of *Lacan contra Foucault: Subjectivity, Sex, Politics* (Bloomsbury, 2018), and co-editor with Surti Singh of *Extimacy: Encounters Between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy* (forthcoming with Northwestern University Press). Nadia has a private psychoanalytic practice in Beirut and she is a member of the Lacan School in the Bay Area, San Francisco.

Anne Boyer is an American poet and essayist. She is the author of *The Romance of Happy Workers* (2008), *The 2000s* (2009), *My Common Heart* (2011), *Garments Against Women* (2015), and *The Handbook of Disappointed Fate* (2018). In 2020, Boyer was awarded the Pullitzer Prize for General Nonfiction for her book *The Undying: Pain, Vulnerability, Mortality, Medicine, Art, Time, Dreams, Data, Exhaustion, Cancer, and Care* (2019).

Ray Brassier is a member of the philosophy faculty at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. He is the author of *Nihil*

Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). He is currently writing about Marx, freedom, and fate.

Andrei Chitu studied philosophy, history and theology at the University of Tübingen and University of Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne. Chitu researches alienation in online cultures as well as the subject of political education for young people. He is preparing his PhD thesis on a possible link between Hegel's Logic and a new conception of minimalism in the arts. In addition to Hegel, Chitu's interests are aligned with the tradition of critical theory, psychoanalysis and contemporary aesthetics. He co-translated Kojeve's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology* to Romanian.

Loss Choi is a toss-up.

Federico Corriente has been a literary translator for over 25 years. Among the many authors he has translated into Spanish are Guy Debord, Jacques Camatte, Fredy Perlman, Roland Simon, Lewis Mumford, Henry James, John Steinbeck, Irvine Welsh, Nick Tosches and Jack Kerouac. He is also the co-author, along with Jorge Montero, of *Citius, Altius, Fortius: El libro negro del deporte* (2011), a history and critique of the simultaneous and inseparable development of sport and capitalism.

Bolívar Echeverría (1941–2010) was a philosopher, economist and cultural critic, born in Ecuador and later nationalised Mexican. He was professor emeritus at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Echeverría studied in Germany (Free University of Berlin) and Mexico. He participated in the German student movement in the late 1960s, establishing friendship and long-lasting collaboration with its leaders, including Rudi Dutschke. In 1970, he started permanent residence in Mexico, where he lived as a translator, also continuing his studies on philosophy and economics. He founded several magazines on culture and politics, such

as *Cuadernos Políticos (Political Notebooks)* (1974–1989); *Palos de la Crítica (roughly translated as Sticks of the Critique)* (1980–1981); *Economía Política (Political Economy)* (1976–1985) and *Ensayos (Essays)* (1980–1988).

Endnotes is a journal/book series and discussion group oriented towards conceptualising the conditions of possibility of a communist overcoming of the capitalist mode of production, https://endnotes.org.uk/.

Neil Gray is a writer and researcher based in Glasgow. His work focuses primarily on housing, urbanisation and class conflict.

Danny Hayward is the author of *People* (Mountain, 2013), *Pragmatic Sanction* (Materials, 2015), and *I/II* (Shit Valley, 2017). He maintains the archive-in-progress www.pxxtry.com, and along with many dozens of others co-runs the communist events series No Money.

Anthony Iles is a book editor and writer based in London. He is a founding member of Full Unemployment Cinema and a Contributing Editor with *Mute* / Metamute.org since 2005. He is the author, with Josephine Berry, of the book *No Room to Move: Art and the Regenerate City* (Mute Books, London, 2011), co-author, with Tom Roberts, of *All Knees and Elbows* (2012), and contributing editor to the anthologies *Anguish Language: Writing and Crisis* (Archive Books, Berlin, 2015) and *Look at Hazards, Look at Losses* (Mute/Kuda, 2017). Essays, interviews and reviews by Anthony have been published in the journals *Variant, Cesura//Acceso, Mute, Radical Philosophy, Rab-Rab: Journal for Political and Formal Inquiries in Art* and *Logos.*

Lisa Jeschke is a poet and performance-maker based in Munich. Her publications include *The Anthology of Poems by Drunk Women* (Materials, 2018) and *Anarcho-Boys* vs.*

Anachro-Cavalry Württemberg (Earthbound Poetry Series, 2021). She is co-editor of the poetry chapbook series MATERIALS/ MATERIALIEN (London/Munich).

Sacha Kahir is an artist whose work has spanned, and frequently combines, poetry, performance art, film, installation, theatre and political discourse. His works explore the possibilities of art as the desire to transform everyday life through aesthetic experimentation, with recent performances, screenings and events having happened at Pauline Perplexe (Paris), CCA (Glasgow), ACUD (Berlin) and numerous other spaces throughout Europe.

Jessika Khazrik is a musician, technologist, artist and writer whose indisciplinary practice ranges from composition to machine learning, ecotoxicology, steganography, performance and the history of science and music.

Dimitra Kotouza lectures in sociology and politics at universities in and around London, and is an editorial collective member of the journals *Mute* and *Endnotes*. She is a contributor to *Beyond Crisis* (PM Press, 2018, Eds. John Holloway et al.) and *Biopolitical Governance* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, Ed. Hannah Richter). Her writing has also appeared in academic journals and radical publications in English and Greek.

Em Hedditch lives in New York. Hedditch has worked with: Cinenova, a feminist film and video distributor (1999–present); Copenhagen Free University (2001–2008); No Total, a site for performance (2012–present); and Coop Fund, a member-organised funding cooperative (2018–present). Hedditch has published texts in *Afterall, Mute Magazine*, and *Art Monthly*, and contributed to the books *Rereading Appropriation* (If I Can't Dance, 2015) and *Anarchic Sexual Desires of Plain Unmarried Schoolteachers* (Selected Press, 2015). Hedditch's self-published works include *A Political Feeling, I Hope So, Coming to Have a*

Public Life, Is it Worth it?, and the e-book, *I Don't Want you to Work as Me, I Want you to Work for Me.*

Mattin is an artist, musician and theorist working conceptually with noise and improvisation. Through his practice he explores performative forms of estrangement as a way to deal with structural alienation. Along with Anthony Iles he edited the book *Noise & Capitalism* (Kritika/Arteleku, 2009). In 2012 CAC Brétigny and Tuamaturgia published his book *Unconstituted Praxis*. In 2017 Mattin took part in documenta14. In 2022 Urbanomic published his book *Social Dissonance*. Mattin currently co-hosts, with Miguel Prado, the podcast Social Discipline. Prado and Mattin are part of the investigation group NRU (Noise Research Union).

Rob Lucas was one of the founders of the Endnotes group and journal. He is currently Digital Editor of *New Left Review*.

Négation, formed in Grenoble in 1968, produced three issues of a journal of the same name in the 1970s before disappearing. It was a successor to a council communist group called Archinoir which had collaborated with the group Informations et Correspondances Ouvrières. Négation left ICO in September 1972.

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia obtained his PhD from the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) at Kingston University in 2016 and has previously been a research fellow at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City, as well as a teacher at the University of Roehampton, Central Saint Martins and University College London (UCL). He has published in journals such as *Language Sciences* and *Radical Philosophy* and contributed to the *Sage Handbook of Critical Theory.* He is currently completing a book on the concept of 'subsumption' in Kant, Hegel and Marx (Brill, 2024).

Roland Simon is a founding member of the group and journal *Théorie communiste*. He is author of *Histoire critique de l'ultragauche,* (Senonevero, 2009). Simon was not directly a member of Négation, but met with former members of the group regularly in the early 1970s and held discussions with a view to forming a common journal. This led to the genesis of Théorie Communiste in 1975 publishing its first issue of the eponymous journal in 1977.

Théorie Communiste refers both to a group (formed in 1975) and an eponymous journal (published from 1977 to the present). Members of TC were drawn from a loose grouping formed from the splintering of *Négation* and Intervention communiste/*Bulletin communiste,* whose former members met during 1974-5 with the intention of forming a common journal project (which ultimately never came to fruition). From 2009 to 2013, TC contributed to SIC, an international communist discussion group and publishing project.

Marina Vishmidt (1976–2024) was a writer, editor and committed anti-fascist. She taught at Goldsmiths, University of London and the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. Her work has appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Ephemera*, *Afterall*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, and *Radical Philosophy*, among others, as well as a number of edited volumes. She was the author of *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital* (Brill, 2018/Haymarket, 2019), and co-author of *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art* with Kerstin Stakemeier (Mute, 2016) and co-editor of *Media Mutandis* with Mary Anne Francis, Jo Walsh and Lewis Sykes (NODE.London, 2016).

Timeline of Subsumption

This timeline attempts to assemble some key milestones in the history of the transmission of the marxist concept of subsumption and proximate concepts: totality, reification and domination. It does not present a complete history of the concept but it compiles some important references of its fragmented and haphazard publishing trajectory.

1857–58

Karl Marx writes his first draft of *Capital* (first published in 1953 as *Grundrisse*).

1861–63

Karl Marx writes his Second draft of *Capital (the Economic Manuscript of 1861–63*, published in English between 1988 and 1994 as vols. 30–34 of *Marx-Engels Collected Works*).

1857–1865

Bolívar Echeverría dates Marx's manuscript of the *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses* ('The Results of the Immediate Process of Production') to the period between 1857–1865.

1863–64

The *MEGA (Die Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe)* editors in 1988 claimed that from summer 1863 to summer 1864 Marx prepared a manuscript of the first book of *Capital* (it is controversial as to whether this comprised a rough draft or a complete working copy of the intended 'book') including a 'Sixth Chapter' entitled *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses* ('The Results of the Immediate Process of Production').

1863–1866

Both Ernest Mandel and Bruno Maffi date Marx's manuscript (mentioned above) of the *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses* ('The Results of the Immediate Process of Production') to the period between June 1863 and December 1866 (Mandel, 'Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production', *Capital, Vol.1*, 1992).

1867

Publication in Germany of the first edition of Volume 1 of *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie.*

1895/6–1920s

The manuscript of the 'Sixth Chapter' lay untouched in the cupboards of the SPD archive in Berlin for 30 years after the death of Friedrich Engels (1895).

1920s

The Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow commissioned a photographic reproduction of the Marx-Engels estate. The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research was significantly involved in this work. Among the documents most urgently needed were the economic manuscripts of Marx. This is how the copy of the 'Sixth Chapter' arrived in Moscow and was 'immediately deciphered' with the participation of German specialists. This was the preparatory work for a historical-critical Marx-Engels complete edition, the first MEGA.

1923

György Lukács publishes *History and Class Consciousness,* a landmark study for the field of Western Marxism. Though the book does not directly approach the concept of subsumption, its emphasis on Marxism as the study of totality, the concept of reification and the idea that the commodity form shapes society and consciousness as a whole, proposes for the first time the idea of a capitalist totality taking hold of all aspects of society. His writings will become hugely influential, from the Frankfurt school and critical theory, to Guy Debord and Franco Fortini. They retain their relevance today through new readings by theorists as diverse as Fredric Jameson, Ray Brassier and Gáspár Miklós Tamás.

1923–28

Issak Rubin was an important historian of economic thought, translator and commentator on Marx's economic manuscripts, writing for the newspaper *Ivestiya Moskovskovo Rabochevo Soveta* journals *Rabochii mir* and *Prodovol'sytennoe delo* on trade unions, labour law and labour relations in the lead up to the

October Revolution in Russia. In 1919 he was invited by David Ryzanov of the Institute of K. Marx and F. Engels to work on translations of Marx's economic manuscripts and taught social sciences at various Moscow educational institutions, becoming a professor at the Institute of Red Professors at the institute of National Economy at Sverdlovsk University. Defending the need for trade unions after the revolution, Rubin, despite his success as a scholar was subjected to a series of arrests from February 1921 until his execution by the NKVD on 27 November 1937. During this time (1923–28) he wrote and published a number of important books and articles on Marx's work publishing the first edition of his *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* in 1923 (I.I. Rubin, *Ocherki po teorii stoimosti Marksa* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923) then reworking it for a second edition in 1924, preparing a new translation of Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and developing the manuscript of his *Essays on Marx's Theory of Money* developing the ideas of the earlier work on value, which remained unpublished until 2011. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* treat subsumption as an integral dynamic within the logic of capital, the point of connection between the 'production relations among people and the material categories', the process by which 'all economic forms are "subsumed" under the form which is dominant in the given mode of production'(p,24) Rubin links this conceptualisation of subsumption to concepts of 'reification' and 'crystallisation', by which the social character of things determines the social character of their owners.[...] as a result, particular individuals are subsumed under the dominant type of production relations.' (p.25) In 1967 Yugoslav Economics Professor Milos Samardzija and his former student Fredy Perlman began translating Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* into English from a Serbo-Croatian edition. Perlman subsequently printed several editions from 1972 onwards in Detroit and published these as Black & Red pamphlets providing Rubin's early classic with eventual worldwide distribution.

1930

Max Horkheimer becomes the Director of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. In the transcript of his inaugural lecture, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', Horkheimer uses the term subsumption, in its normative Aristotelean or Kantian sense of classification through concepts, to argue the case for theory as mediating between two forms of knowledge or understanding:

> There is always, on the one hand, the conceptually formulated knowledge and, on the other, the facts to be subsumed under it. Such a subsumption or establishing of a relation between the simple perception or verification of a fact and the conceptual structure of our knowing is called its theoretical explanation.[1]

1932–33

According to the preface of Karl Marx, *Das Kapital 1.1 Die Zusammenfassung des Erstens Bands Des 'Kapitals':* 'From 1932 a new series of the 'Marx-Engles-Archive' was published parallel to the MEGA, in which previously unpublished manuscripts and excerpts were edited. For Volume II, the 'Marx-Engles-Archives' were edited by Paul Weller and Horst Fröhlich (German version) and Lew Abranmowitsch Leontjew (Russian version and foreword). The volume was published in Moscow in March 1933, printed in Leningrad, with an edition of 25,375 copies shown therein.'

1932–35

In the Berlin Transportation strike the communist union organisation *Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts Opposition'* or RGO (Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition) worked with the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization to coordinate the strike, lending credibility to the growing Nazi movement. (By 1935 the RGO along with many other left organisations were crushed by the Nazis in their rapid rise to power.) In a recent book, *History and Obstinacy* (Zone Books, 2014), Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt describe the impact of this moment on the

development of critical theory by the German academic left: 'As of 1932, the thinkers of Critical Theory practiced by the Frankfurt School no longer considered the proletariat as the historical subject of emancipation. They observed how Communist unions and National Socialist organised labour joined forces in the Berlin transportation strike of 1932. How could it have happened that workers possessed no immunity to fascism?'

1933–36

A part of the Marx-Engels estate, which at that time was stored in a bank safe in Copenhagen, had been appropriated by the Polish historian Marek Kriger before 1933 (according to a certificate for his services in cataloging the documents of the First International and in compiling a complete index of the Marx-Engels estate in the SPD archive and for 'sending money' to the SPD board). These included the *Grundrisse* manuscript and the second draft of *Capital,* as well as other manuscripts for the first and second volumes. In 1935 he offered them to the Moscow Institute for sale in Vienna, which accepted the offer and acquired the entire collection.

1935–36

Secret negotiations took place between representatives of the exiled SPD and the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute about the purchase of the Marx-Engels legacy from the SPD archive in Paris, but these failed.

1941

Friedrich Pollock publishes 'State Capitalism: its Possibilities and Limitations', a text which had wide implications for his colleagues in the Frankfurt School and their readers. Observing the parallel development of systems of total governance and an end to the 'primacy of the economic', or the advent of an 'autonomy of the political' over 'organic' economic forces, in Roosevelt's New Deal in the USA; German National Socialism and Socialism under Stalin in Russia, Pollock envisaged 'no economic limitations at all to the existence and expansion of state capitalism' across the globe.

1942

During the summer four seminars took place in Los Angeles on the theory of needs. The attendees were drawn from two groups of German intellectuals: the Frankfurt School and the Brecht Circle: Bertolt Brecht, Hans Eisler, Max Horkheimer, Gunther Anders, Theodor W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno, Friedrich Pollock and Ludwig Marcuse discussed works by Neitzsche, Aldous Huxley, questions of need, culture and suffering in capitalism and their implications for crisis theory and Marxian critiques of capitalist society in an era defined by the emergence of Keynesian welfare systems and 'state capitalism'.[2]

1944

Written during the second world war, *Dialektik der Aufklärung (Dialectic of Enlightenment)*, a collaboration between Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, is first published and circulated privately amongst friends and colleagues under the title *Philosophische Fragmente*. This complex work responds to the rise of fascism and the mass destruction of the Second World War theorising an evolving logic of 'total domination' derived from Marx's analysis of capital, but now unmoored from its object and projected onto the entirety of human history. After its publication in Amsterdam in 1947 as *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, the book and excerpts of it are extensively pirated and circulate amongst elements of the new left in Germany until a popular edition is published in Germany in 1969 by S. Fischer Verlag.

1952

Under the pseudonym's Marie Brant and Ellen Santori, Selma James contributes to the book *A Woman's Place*, first published as a column in *Correspondence*, a bi-weekly newspaper written and edited by its readers with an audience of mainly working class people unusual at the time. The newspaper had pages dedicated to giving women, young people and Black people an autonomous

voice. It was later put out as a pamphlet by the Correspondence group and became a bestseller, foreshadowing the later success of the pamphlet by Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (1972).

1953

The *Rough Draft* was printed in Berlin in 1953, by Dietz Verlag, under the title *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Okonomie (Rohentwurf)*, 1857–1858. 'Until that time there were only three or four copies of the original Moscow edition in the West.'
– Rosdolsky, 'Author's Preface', *The Making of Marx's Capital* (1977).

1950s–early-60s

Bruno Maffi works on the manuscripts of 'The Results' and the *Grundrisse* in the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute for Social History) in Amsterdam.

1957

Extracts from the *Grundrisse* are published in *il programma comunista* No.20, the journal of the Italian International Communist Party edited by Bruno Maffi (French translation in *Invariance* Série I, No.3, (1968) pp. 82-110 (According to Jacques Camatte)). Maffi was a comrade of Bordiga's in the Italian communist left and, in the post-war period, the Internationalist Communist Party.

1962

Mario Tronti's essay, 'La fabbrica et la societa' ('The Factory and Society') appears in *Quaderni rossi*, No.2, 1962 in which he first develops his widely influential concept of the 'social factory'. He writes:

> Capital is able to capture, in its own way, the *unity* of the labour process with the process of valorisation; and

captures it in an ever greater manner the more that capitalist production develops and the more that the capitalist form of production grasps all the other spheres of society, invading the whole network of social relations.

1964–66

Between 1964–66 the manuscript of *Le Sixieme chapitre inédit du Capital et l'oeuvre économique de Marx* is prepared by Jacques Camatte with Amadeo Bordiga. This eventually appeared with *Capital and Community* in *Invariance* No.2, April-June, 1968, available: https://archive.leftove.rs/document/KDB/7. This was also to have been the title to the Italian translation of the following texts: *The Unpublished Sixth Chapter of 'Capital' and the Economic Work of Marx* (1964-6), with the additional notes of 1972; *Theses on Capitalism* (T); *A Propos Capital* (1971); *About the Revolution* (1972). The publishers, Dedalo, thought otherwise, and they appeared instead under the title *Il capitale totale* (1976).

1965

The origins of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* (New Reading of Marx or NML) movement in Germany develop from the return to close readings of Marx at seminars held by Theodor W. Adorno at the University of Frankfurt. This work was continued by his students Alfred Schmidt, Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt, pursuing, with differing emphases, a systematic reconstruction of Marx's work from his various texts, developing the dialectical reading of totality and attempting to unify the critique of political economy with the critique of society.

Throughout the year Hans-Georg Backhaus held a seminar as part of Adorno's course at the University of Frankfurt. Under Adorno's influence, he elaborated the essential elements of a new interpretation of Marx. Four years later he published the best known and most widely translated of his essays, 'On the Dialectics of the

Value-form'. This was the blueprint of the research programme that became *NML*.
– Ricardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, 'The *Neue Marx-Lektüre:* Putting the Critique of Political Economy Back Into the Critique of Society', 2015.

1966

A resumé by Bruno Maffi of *The Results* appears in *il programma comunista* Nos.5–6 March 1966, available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/LNQ/ In France, besides the translation of the Italian resumé published in *Programme Communiste,* No.35, April/June, 1966, available https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/KON/ there was also an incomplete translation in 1967, by M. Rubel, 'Resultats du proces immediat de la production' in *Cahiers de l'ISEA* (Institut des Sciences Mathématiques et Économiques Appliquées), Section Marxologie.

Publication of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (Buchet-Chastel, 1967) in France. A book formed by a series of 221 short theses in the form of aphorisms, which argues that a new form of class society is emerging characterised by the 'undisturbed development of modern capitalism' by which both everyday life, consumption and production will increasingly become dominated by the 'integrated spectacle' (Thesis 65). Making the claim that the workers' movement was destroyed during the inter-war period by Stalinist bureaucracy on the one hand and fascist totalitarianism on the other (Thesis 105), the text concludes that revolutionary organisations must now direct themselves against this assault by developing an 'integrated critique' 'directed globally against every aspect of alienated social life.' (Thesis 121).

1967–68

Translation of the *Grundrisse* into French by Roger Dangeville, published 'Union génerale d'éditions' by 10/18 as *'Grundrisse' 2 Chapitre du Capital.*

1968

Jacques Camatte's extensive commentary on Roger Dangeville's French translation of the 'Sixth chapter' of *Capital* is published as 'Le VI° chapitre inédit du Capital et l'œuvre économique de Marx', *Invariance*, série I, No.2, 1968, available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/KDB/1

Publication in German of Roman Rozdolski's *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* with commentary on the *Grundrisse,* 'Results', the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63* and other 'lost' or incomplete texts by Marx. Roman Rozdolski, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marxschen 'Kapital'; der Rohentwurf des „Kapital" 1857-58*, Frankfurt [am Main] Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

1969

'A full translation into Italian was later published by La Nuova Italia in 1969, entitled *Il Capitale libro I, capitolo VI inedito*. The translation is by Bruno Maffi, who also wrote an introduction which shows how far one can translate a text without understanding it'.
– Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community*, 1988.

'Transition' by Jacques Camatte and Gianni Collu, published in *Invariance,* Serie I No.8, 1969 available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/KDG. This important, but little known essay, begins by demarcating the differences between real and formal domination (subsumption):

> The starting point for the critique of the existing society of capital has to be the restatement of the concepts of formal and real domination as the historical phases of capitalist development.

The first unabridged translation by Enzo Grillo of the *Grundrisse*, based on the German edition of 1953, was

published by La Nuova Italia as *Lineamenti fondamentali della critica dell'economia politica 1857–1858* [*Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy 1857–1858*] in two separate volumes, the first in 1968 and the second in 1970. After some debate, it was decided that the text should be partitioned at the point where Marx turns from production to circulation, so that the first volume included the 1857 'Introduction', the chapter on money and the section on 'The Production Process of Capital', and volume two opened with 'The Circulation Process of Capital'. The book was reprinted twice, in 1978 and 1997, and enjoyed astonishing success.

> Firstly, it should be noted that 'The Results', which appeared in German and in Russian in 1933, passed unnoticed at that time. A really widespread diffusion had to await 1969 when it appeared as 'Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktions-prozesses' (*Archiv Sozialistischer Literatur*, Vol.17, Verlag Neue Kritik Frankfurt). Since then it has been amply cited in various reviews (cf. in particular *Sozialistische Politik,* No 8, 1970).
> – Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community,* 1988.

1971

Full translation of the 'Results' into French: Karl Marx, *Un Chapitre inédit du Capital.* (Trans. (Traduction et présentation) Roger Dangeville), Union générale d'éditions (10–18), 1971.

A Spanish edition of 'The Results' translated by Pedro Scaron is published by Siglo XXI in Mexico as Karl Marx, *El Capital Libro I Capitulo VI (inédito): Resultados del proceso inmediato de producion.* This edition comes with an introduction by José Aricó, a Marxist who is part of the so-called 'Gramscian Argentines'. His introduction ends with these final reflections:

> This society must be overthrown by the forces that generate its internal contradictions. Marx, in the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* demonstrates how within capitalism itself arise the social forces destined to bury it. – José Aricó, 'Introduction' in Karl Marx, *El Capital Libro I Capitulo VI (inédito): Resultados del proceso inmediato de produccion,* (Trans. Pedro Scaron), Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1971.

Antonio Negri uses the term subsumption (*sussunzione*) for the first time, in the text 'Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization', *Potere Operaio*, no.45, available: https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/AKNR

1970–3

The formation of Rivolta Femminile (July, 1970), Collettivo di Lotta Femminista/Movimento Femminista Romano (1971) Lotta Femminista (June, 1971) and other feminist groups in Italy contributes to the dissolution of workerist groups and positions previously focussed on the mass worker as *the* singular revolutionary subject.[3]

1972

Publication of 'Contre-interprétation du "Contre-planning dans l'atelier"', *ICO* No.118 (June 1972). This unsigned text (written by one of the future founders of Négation) had already presented a systematic critique of the managerial conception of the refusal of work, i.e., a critique of its fundamental inconsistency. This text, 'Contre-interprétation du "Contre-planning dans l'atelier"', was a reply to Bill Watson's article ('Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor'), on which [John] Zerzan, shortly thereafter, had largely founded his 'paradoxical' analysis of the refusal of work. This was a theoretically seminal critique. It laid the groundwork for the analysis of the 'refusal of work' as the practical foundation for the theory of the self-negation of the proletariat.' From Théorie Communiste, 'Real Subsumption and the Contradiction between the Proletariat and Capital: An Historical Approach' (p.190).

The publication by Selma James and Mariorosa Dalla Costa of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* draws on Tronti's thesis of the 'social factory' to place women and women's work as central to the reproduction of capitalism at a global scale and their agency and self-activity, therefore, key to its subversion and overcoming.

Full translation of the *Results* into Italian. *l capitale. Libro 1., capitolo 6. inedito: risultati del processo di produzione immediato* / Karl Marx ; presentazione, traduzione e note di Bruno Maffi Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1972.

In June elements of Potere Operaio's male membership attacked a seminar at the University of Rome organised by Lotta Femminista 'breaking windows and hurling water-filled condoms; in the process, a number of the seminar's participants were injured.'[4]. Lotta Femmista responded in a text published following the attack:

> In seeing women as the instruments of capitalist attack upon the wage, PO [Potere Operaio] navigates in dangerous waters. The traditional motive for attacking the migrant worker, especially if he or she is Black (or an Italian Southerner), is that their presence threatens the conquest of the indigenous working class. It is exactly the same thing that is said of women in relation to men. The anti-racist (and thus anti-nationalist and anti-sexist) point of view, the point of view of struggle, is to discover the organisational weakness that permits the more powerful sections to be divided from those with less power. In other words, to discover the organisational weakness which, by permitting capital to plan this division, defeats us. Today this question is one of the fundamental questions that the class must confront.
> – *Lotta Femminista*, 1972, pp.18–19 cited in Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven* (2002).

1970–1975

Michael Heinrich's description of the discussions around the concept of subsumption in Germany:

> As far as I know and remember, there were discussions in Germany about 'real subsumption' which mainly reflect the Italian *operaist* discussions. During 1970s there was a part of the left who saw these Italian discussions (and the *operaist* movement) as the most advanced and tried to apply their analysis to Germany. See for example Karlheinz Roth and also the journal *Wildcat.* During the first half of the 1970s we had also a lot of discussions about the 'reform' or restructuring of the German universities. In this time several analysis emerged which interpreted this restructuring as a transition from formal subsumption of the universities to real subsumption.
> – Michael Heinrich, private communication to the editors, 25 May, 2019.

1972

Publication of Négation, 'Le Proletariat comme destructeur du travail', *Négation*, No.1, one of the first texts published and circulating widely within the French ultra-left to draw extensively on the newly disseminated texts of Marx and develop the concept of formal and real 'domination' (subsumption) as a concept for periodising the relationship between class and capital.

1972–1989

A widespread debate focussing on the 'mode of production' and agricultural development in India takes place between Indian Marxists, socialists and communists involving close reexamination of the categories of formal and real subsumption. See for example, Dipanker Gupta, 'Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital: The Instance of Share-Cropping', (1980). Raju J. Das summarises,

> the famous Indian mode of production debate, [...] discussing how certain scholars define capitalism in general and capitalism in the Indian context (including in Indian agriculture), and then presents an alternative approach. In doing so it builds on Marx's discussion in *Capital Volume 1* on subsumptions of labor, a discussion that is often neglected or misinterpreted. It argues that capitalism can exist when formal subsumption prevails and that India is a dominantly capitalist country. It also argues that the transition to real subsumption, with attendant technological change, can be a very long process, and, that notwithstanding Marx's view about 'spontaneous' transition to real subsumption, it is anything but spontaneous. That transition is mediated by the changing balance of power of capital and labor, which occurs in a context of a whole host of geographically-specific factors such as capitalist state interventions.[5]

1973

Publication of Négation, 'Lip et la contre-revolution autogestionnaire', *Négation*, No.3, which develops and popularises Négation's radical theorisation of subsumption, the decline of the workers movement and their critique of self-management, through the concrete example of the occupation and self-management of the LIP factory in Besançon. The issue is translated into English and widely disseminated by Black & Red in Detroit from 1975 onwards. Négation, *Lip and the Self-managed Counter-revolution*, 1975. Loren Goldner summarises the impact of the so-called 'Unpublished Sixth Chapter' of Vol.I of *Capital* and the new theorisation of subsumption ('domination') by the French ultra-left in this period:

> All of the French currents put at center stage a text of Marx which, in the long run, may be more important than all the other new material that started to come to light in the 1950's and 1960's: the so-called 'Unpublished Sixth

> Chapter' of volume one of *Capital.* It is not known why Marx removed it from the original version of Vol.I. But it is a materialist 'Phenomenology of Mind'. Ten pages suffice to refute the Althusserian claims that Marx forgot Hegel in his 'late period'. But the affirmation of the continuity with Hegel's method is the least of it; the fundamental categories elaborated in the text are the distinctions between absolute and relative surplus-value and what Marx calls the 'extensive' and 'intensive' phases of accumulation, corresponding to the 'formal' and 'real' domination of capital over labor. These are introduced in a very theoretical way; Marx doesn't attempt to apply them to history generally. But the French ultra-left started to periodize capitalist history around exactly these distinctions. 'Extensive' and 'intensive' phases of capitalist history are not unique to Marxists; they have also been used by bourgeois economic historians as descriptive devices. One current summarized the distinction in its essence as 'the phase which de-substantiates the worker to leave only the proletarian.'
> – Loren Goldner, 'Communism is the Material Human Community: Amadeo Bordiga Today', (1991).

Publication of Antonio Negri, 'Workers' Party Against Work' (1973) a text in which Negri goes into much detail about the concepts of formal and real subsumption. He discusses both the 'Results' and the *Grundrisse* and indicates his familiarity with Roman Rosdolsky's, then recent work, *The Making of Marx's Capital* (published in Germany in 1968). The text contains an important note qualifying the Italian translation of the term and Negri's interpretation of Marx's use of the concept of subsumption.

> In the Italian translation, B. Maffi prefers to use the Italian term '*sottomissione*' (submission) instead of '*sussunzione*' (subsumption) to render the German word *Subsumption.* In the note on pp.51-52 Maffi argues that it was a matter

of making the choice in favor of a term that does not have mere conceptual consistency. We don't think that this argument holds up. The term '*sottomissione*' (submission) is every bit as conceptual as the word '*sussunzione*' (subsumption). Besides, it makes the dialectical reality of the passage disappear from view.
– Antonio Negri, 'Workers' Party Against Work' (1973), *Books for Burning* p.116 n9.

Giorgio Cesarano and Gianni Collu publish their book *Apocalisse e rivoluzione,* Dedalo libri in Bari. Cesarano was a founding member of the group Ludd – Consigli proletari in 1971 in Milan. Gianni Collu was a close collaborator of Jacques Camatte in the 1960s and 70s and contributor to *Invariance.* Clearly influenced by Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle,* in this book they criticise technology and cybernetics while radicalising Jacques Camatte's thesis around real domination. For them, capital has expanded so much that it totally dominates the entire planet, the whole human species and their interior lives. They describe real domination as an integral colonisation of everything that exists.

1974

In Latin America, revolutionary guerrilla groups such as Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre in Mexico brought the concepts into their political vocabulary, deploying the concepts of real and formal subsumption in their communiques to explain the shifting terrain of class conflict and clarify directions of struggle (e.g. in their critique of trade unions which, having been absorbed into the apparatuses of state repression, had undergone a historical inversion from revolutionary to counter-revolutionary institutions, or in their analysis of the developmental stage of particular sections of the economy).
– Andrés Saenz De Sicilia. See Liga Communist 23 de Septiembre, 'Llamamento a la Clase Obrera: a los oberos del país', October 1974; Communique from 10 January 1974.

1976

Inclusion of 'The Results of the Immediate Process of Production' in the English editions of *Capital, Vol.1* as an appendix. In this edition the terms used are formal and real subsumption.

1977

Publication of Roman Rosdolsky's *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* in English translation by Pete Burgess, London: Pluto Press, 1977.

Brighton Labour Process Group, 'The Labour Process', *Capital & Class* 1, 1977, pp. 3–26. Important early English language text on capitalist reconfiguration of the labour process and its relation to broader social conditions.

Mario Mieli publishes his legendary *Elementi di critica omosessuale* with publisher Einaudi, combining radical gay and queer thought with Marxist and Deleuzian theory. Mieli was part of the the Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano (Unitarian Revolutionary Homosexual Front which became Fuori as an acronym meaning 'out' as in 'come out' and was founded in Milan in 1971. The concept of real domination has an important role in his book. In fact he starts the first chapter with the claim:

> Contemporary gay movements have developed in countries where capital has reached the stage of real domination. However, while still under the formal domination of capital, and for the first time in history, homosexuals had organised themselves into a movement.

A translators' note, by Evan Calder Williams, in the 2018 Pluto Press edition of *Towards Gay Communism* makes clear the influence of Jacques Camatte and Gianni Collu in Mieli's book in regards to the concepts of formal and real domination.

1978

In Spring, Antonio Negri teaches nine seminars on the *Grundrisse* at the Ecole Normale Superieure (Rue d'Ulm), Paris at the invitation of Louis Althusser.

The artist Francesco Matarrese influenced by the writings of Mario Tronti published his *Telegramma di rifiuto del lavoro astratto in arte* (*a refusal of abstract labour in art*) and began creating an *Impossible Catalogue of Non-Works of Art.*

Alfred Sohn-Rethel publishes in English *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, a culmination of a lifelong engagement with the relationship between social forms and forms of thought. Following the work of Georg Simmel, Sohn-Rethel develops the concept of real abstraction, an abstraction - which is neither empirical nor ontological but historical - that emerges from the moment of commodity exchange. For Sohn-Rethel, real abstraction emerges from our human action, not from our private mind, so even if it has a conceptual form, it exists independently of consciousness. This constitutes a social a priori which reflects itself in conceptual abstraction; we project the characteristics of a commodity like money (for example, universality and abstraction) into conceptual forms. Sohn-Rethel would go as far as claiming that a Kantian transcendental subject is a fetish already present in the money commodity form. The forms of thought and social forms are glued in what Sohn-Rethel calls 'social synthesis'; 'the network of relations by which society forms a coherent whole'. This social synthesis requires a necessary false consciousness. However, this is not a distortion in consciousness but instead originates in our social activities within exchange. His work was influential for the Frankfurt School and especially for the work of Theodor Adorno.

1979

French and Italian editions of Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* published drawing on the seminars held in Paris in 1978.

1980

US Marxist-Autonomist group and journal Midnight Notes published the pamphlet and extended essay, *The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse* by George Caffentzis, a tour de force of the concepts and analysis the group had been developing through activity in movements and groups (such as Wages for Housework and Zerowork) over the prior decades. Within innovative readings of the so-called 'energy' or 'oil crisis', struggles against work, primitive accumulation in the global south and in poor communities in the US, the pamphlet sketches the contours of a new phase of capital accumulation and class struggle against it through the transfer of capital away from industrial and Fordist sectors characterised by stable investment cycles and mass workers, towards technological investment in low-labour high investment sectors, supported by the expansion of finance, insurance, real estate, computing, communications and microelectronics as sectors. They argue that the profits crisis which led to the energy crisis was driven by the refusal of work by proletarians. The price hike in turn, means that the 'resolution of the energy crisis requires the destruction of the old type of line worker and the creation of a new figure of exploitation.'(p.18) Though subsumption is not evoked in the text, the narrative of a shift from Keynesian post-war compromise to a new phase of accumulation maps closely onto similar periodisations developed within Italian and French ultra-lefts based on the new readings of Marx's manuscripts. Ultimately rather than emphasising a terminal or total closure by capital Midnight Notes emphasise the continuity and invariance of capital's needs to exploit labour.

1984

Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, published in English translation in hardback by Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., South Hadley, Massachusetts, a popular edition is published by Autonomedia and Pluto Press in 1991. The english editions includes a new author's preface written by Negri from Rebibbia

prison in Italy in the form of a dialogue between a prisoner (himself) and a free man (his prior self, the author of the book):

> Prisoner: I don't like argument ad hominem, always easy for those who are on the outside. In reality, here in jail, I am certainly subjected to both the law of value and the law of surplus-value. Concretized in an immense system of domination, they weigh on me in an unbearable way.
> Free Man: That of course is just what's said in *Marx Beyond Marx*, and I don't understand how you fail to realize that. The capitalist supersession of the law of value – what Marx calls the process of real subsumption – dislocates the relations of exploitation as a whole. It transforms exploitation into a global social relation. Jail equals factory.
> Prisoner: I don't need to be persuaded that the world is a prison, but how to get out of it?
> Free Man: The great problem that is posed in *Marx Beyond Marx* is that of the definition of antagonism in this real subsumption. What does it mean to struggle against capital when capital has subjugated all of lived time, not only that of the working day, but all, all of it. Reproduction is like production, life is like work. At this level, to break with capital is to make a prison break.

Bolívar Echeverría, 1984. 'La "forma natural" de la reproducción social'. *Cuadernos Políticos*, No.41, p.33–46. 2014. English translation: 'Use-value: Ontology and Semiotics', (Trans. Andrés Saenz De Sicilia and Sandro Brito Rojas), Radical Philosophy, No.188, November/December 2014, pp.24–38,

1988

Enrique Dussel's *Hacia un Marx desconocido*, published in Spanish by Siglo XXI. English edition translated by Yolanda Angulo, *Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 1861–63*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Publication in English of Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community: the Results of The Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx*, (Trans. David Brown), London: Unpopular books, 1988.

> This text has been around for six years in photocopy form. Unfortunately only a few copies have been produced and we feel it deserves to be more widely read. It is a heavy read as it deals with complex arguments in some of Marx's writings. It particularly relates to the *Grundrisse* and *The Immediate Process of Production* both of which have only been available since the seventies. These texts show how shallow the outlook of the Marxists of the Second and Third International, and their acolytes, are. However we have no desire to try and drag Marx out of the mire of leftism, a task which certain communist have attached importance to. From our own studies of Marx, it can clearly be seen that he had many weaknesses (eg: Euro-centrism, German chauvinism). In other words he was human, all too human. We regard the search for a pure Marx, and the pure interpretation of Marx to be a fools errand formulated by those who seek a new Moses with tablets of proletarian truth which merely need to be unearthed and scrubbed clean before being presented to the class. Such fetishisation of a historical figure can only obscure the fact that communism is a product of the class struggle, not of an individuals mind.
> – Richard Essex (AKA Fabian Thompsett), from the publisher's preface.

1993

BA thesis in Spanish by Celso Grande Gonzalez, *En torno al desarrollo e investigación de la teoría de la subsunción formal y real del proceso de trabajo al Capital de K.Marx en México*, Facultad de Economia, UNAM.

Publication by Moishe Postone of *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory,* a landmark study recombining Marx's work, the New Reading of Marx and the critical theory tradition. Postone has contributed substantially to the recovery of Marx's work as more than the critique of political economy, and instead reconstructs it as a contribution to critical theory as a critique of a society thoroughly dominated by production for profit and exchange. Through a reading of Marx's, then recently recovered manuscripts (e.g. the *Grundrisse*) whilst simultaneously rereading the work of the Frankfurt School through these new readings of Marx, Postone arrived at an account of Marx's method and the reestablishment of the critical theory tradition as a form of 'immanent social critique' which accounts for its own historical specificity and determination as well as that of the object towards which critique is directed. Rather than focusing on Marx categories of real and formal subsumption Postone instead elucidates capitalism as an historically determinate social totality characterised by forms of abstract and impersonal social domination by value and capital. In doing so, Postone emphasises the negativity and imbrication with capital of the category of labour, and indicates a path for critical theory beyond the pessimism of the Frankfurt School, whose economic assumptions he shows, in an essay with Barbara Brick, 'Critical Pessimism and the Limits of Traditional Marxism' (1982), were based on an overreliance on 'traditional Marxism' which led to their shared perception of an overcoming of social contradiction in the development of capitalism during and immediately following World War Two.

1994

Doctoral thesis in Spanish by Carlos Prieto del Campo: *Luchas de clases, antagonismo y general intellect en la subsunción real: Por una teoría marxista de la ontología de la subversión de la fuerza de trabajo colectiva en el capitalismo global*, Universidad Complutense De Madrid, Facultad De Filosofía, directed by Gabriel Albiac Lopiz.

1996

Melancholic Troglodytes journal begins publication and includes scattered references to formal and real domination e.g. Issue 2 p.3 Section VI.

1997

In his text 'Form-Effectiveness-Virtuality' (1995-7) Jacques Camatte returns to the problem of subsumption and questions Marx's original terminology. He proposes a reformulation of the the terms formal and real subsumption as ‘superficial’ and ‘substantial’ domination. Camatte claims that capital is becoming increasingly autonomous by going through a process of anthropomorphisation resulting from the union of a form and a substance. For Camatte, exchange-value as an artificial form has become the substance of reality: ‘the substantial [substantielle] domination of capital is a moment of realisation of the becoming of substance in the state of subject. Now this is another way of saying that with capital dead labour increasingly dominates the worker. It is a moment of the *Einverleibung* or *Verkörperung* (which can be translated as incarnation) of capital and thus of its anthropomorphosis.’ According to Camatte, ‘substantial’ domination leads to the virtualisation of all life: ‘i.e. a virtual fact that participates in the elaboration of a virtual world, there is no more possibility of a becoming; everything is resorbed.’ Camatte also develops the concepts of speciosis – as the separations of the species from nature through the process of virtualisation – and ontosis for describing this separation and the adaptation to the virtual at the individual level. This text and many other texts by Camatte are available here: https://revueinvariance.pagesperso-orange.fr/

2001

The publication of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*, further popularises discussions around real and formal subsumption in English.

2002

Steve Wright publishes *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*. In this book Wright traces the discussions around subsumption and social factory in the Autonomia movement in Italy in the 60s and 70s.

Jason Read in his book *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* traces the influence of Marx in post-structuralism and post-autonomia thinking with an emphasis on the production of subjectivity, especially in the chapter 'The Real Subsumption of Subjectivity by Capital'.

Carlos Alberto Castillo Mendoza's essay: 'Notas introductorias sobre subsunción del trabajo en el capital' is published in *Iralka*, No.17.

Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, articulates *operaismo* and *autonomia's* concepts of the 'social factory' and account of 'real subsumption' conjointly.

2004

Publication of Patrick Murray's crucial essay 'The Social and Material Transformation of Production by Capital: Formal and Real Subsumption in Capital, Volume I', in *The Constitution of Capital Essays on Volume I of Marx's Capital*, (Eds) Riccardo Bellofiore and Nicola Taylor, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.243–273.

Publication of Mike Davis' essay 'Planet of the Slums', in *New Left Review,* (subsequently developed as a book in 2006). Davis surveys a growing library of development literature to explore the consequences and contradictions of the most rapid period of urbanisation in human history in Asia, Africa and South America. In this process, he argues, expanding megacities are becoming 'a sink for surplus labour which can only keep pace with subsistence by ever more heroic feats of self-exploitation' (p.27) and therefore

an expanding globally hegemonic, but not homogenous, 'informal proletariat'. Davis' research presents several specific challenges to dominant conceptualisations of 'subsumption'. On the one hand, it is clear that capitalist modernisation in the third world is far from following the model established in the west. Outside of Korea, China and Taiwan, urban population growth has become 'radically decoupled from industrialization.' (p.9) Consequently there is an expansion not of full-time waged labour but instead informal work for an, only occasional, wage, and even more often infrequent payment, unpaid labour, child slavery, prostitution, debt arrangements and the subdivision of existing workers wages. There is neither a tendency towards homogeneity of global living labour as a proletariat nor its capacity for resistance. Nor does the evolution and globalisation of capitalist production processes flow neatly from formal subsumption to real subsumption.

2008

Jorge Veraza, *Subsunción real del consumo bajo el capital* published in Mexico. In 1977 Veraza formulated the concept of the real subsumption of consumption under capital to criticise George Bataille's interpretation of consumption, and to comprehensively characterise contemporary neoliberal world capitalism in the aftermath of May 68.

Stewart Martin, 'Pedagogy of Human Capital', *Mute*, Vol.2 No.8, pp.32–45. Martin argues that it is 'plausible to consider [the subsumption of life] as the regulative idea of a number of theories of late capitalism.'

2009

Christopher Arthur's essay 'The Possessive Spirit of Capital: Subsumption/Inversion/Contradiction' appears in *Re-reading Marx: New Perspectives after the Critical Edition*, (Eds.) Riccardo Bellofiore and Roberto Fineschi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp.148–62.

William Clare Roberts, 'Abstraction and Productivity: Reflections on Formal Causality', in Andrew Chitty and Martin McIvor (Eds.), *Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 188–201.

Publication of Rob Lucas and Nick Gray (Endnotes), 'Capital, Subsumption and the History of the Class Relation' in Tom Bunyard (Ed.), *The Devil's Party* London: Centre for Cultural Studies, 2009. This is an early version of the text, critically engaging with the category of subsumption in its divergent use in the work of Antonio Negri, Jacques Camatte and Théorie Communiste, that will appear in Endnotes No.2 as 'The History of Subsumption'.

Mark Fisher published *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books). In *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher describes the pervasive belief that capitalism is the only viable economic and political system, making it difficult to imagine a coherent alternative. He refers to this phenomenon as 'business ontology', where capitalism has become so ingrained in every aspect of life – culture, politics, economics, healthcare, education, and even personal identities – that people are expected to operate like businesses. Fisher explores in great detail the increasing bureaucratisation of society and the ripple effects of capitalist realism on people's mental health.

2010

April, *Endnotes* No.2 carries the article 'The History of Subsumption' taking as its starting point the radical conceptualisations of Jacques Camatte and Antonio Negri, and the subsequent development of the term by Théorie Communiste within a radical periodisation of the class relation.

2011

Publication of Screamin' Alice, 'On the Periodisation of the Capitalist Class Relation' in *Sic*, No.1, November, 2011, a text

which picks up directly on the question of periodisation posed in the two earlier texts on subsumption by Endnotes.

2012

Raju Das, 'Reconceptualizing Capitalism: Forms of Subsumption of Labor, Class Struggle, and Uneven Development', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 44 (2), June 2012, pp.178-200. Uses Marx's subsumption concepts to analyse capitalist development and struggles in India. Response by Gilbert L. Skillman, 'Production Relations in Agrarian Capitalist Development: A Comment on Das', *Review of Radical Political Economics* (online), 27 November.

2013

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia organises a workshop on 'The Theory and Politics of Subsumption' on the 25th of May at Birkbeck University, London with speakers Massimiliano Tomba, Christopher J. Arthur, Rob Lucas and Anthony Iles.

Publication of Gilbert L. Skillman, 'The Puzzle of Marx's Missing "Results": A Tale of Two Theories', 2013. Skillman argues that the removal of 'The Results' from the manuscript *Capital Volume 1* was part of a deliberate strategy on Marx's part of 'that served to downplay and obscure his historical account of surplus-value relative to its value-theoretic counterpart.' Furthermore, 'the capacity of preindustrial forms of capital to yield surplus-value when financing commodity production is affirmed in Volume 3 of *Capital*, published after Marx's death, and his extensive treatment of developments in the capitalist labor process [...] is broadly consistent with his analysis of subsumption in the 'Results' chapter.' Skillman concluded that in the end Marx's value-theoretic historical accounts of surplus-value were and remain *'mutually inconsistent'*.

2014

Jacques Camatte publishes Le mouvement du capital, where he revisits the concept of subsumption in the 12.2 section 'Capital, forms and form'.

What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption? Workshop organised by Mattin and Loty Negarti with the participation of Ray Brassier, Federico Corriente, Anthony Iles, Dimitra Kotouza, Zoe Sutherland and Rob Lucas (Endnotes) and Marina Vishmidt. Bulegoa z/b, Bilbao.

2015

Praktyka Teoretyczna, Vol.2, No.16, Warsaw journal issue published specifically dealing with the concept of real subsumption with translations into Polish of Bolívar Echeverría and others.

Harootunian, Harry, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

A version of the text *Error* by Endnotes is published in *Bad Feelings*. A book produced by Arts Against Cuts and commissioned by Nina Power, Book Works in London.

2016

Publication online of Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, PhD Thesis. Kingston University, 2016.

In June *Cuardernos de negación* published in Buenos Aires their 10th issue focussing on the concept of real subsumption.

2018

What Is to Be Done Under Real Subsumption? Workshop, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. Organised by Mattin, Anthony

Iles and Paweł Nowożycki with the particiaption of Beata “Bobo” Bąk, Sean Bonney, Sebastian Cichocki, Colin Hacklander, Farahnaz Hatam, Anthony Iles, Edyta Jarząb, Sacha Kahir, Mattin, Paweł Nowożycki, John Nzoka, Mikołaj Ratajczak, Marina Vishmidt and Sylwia "Ruda" Żołądkiewicz.

What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption? Panel discussion with Marina Vishmidt, Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, Anthony Iles and Mattin at Historical Materialism conference, London.

2019

Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsen and James Steinhoff publish their book *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism*, offering a reinterpretation of capital and subsumption, taking into consideration recent developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Following Marx’s concept of subsumption, the authors in this book suggest a new stage called ‘hyper-subsumption’ to describe capitalism in relation to artificial intelligence in what they call AI Capital. In this stage of ‘hyper-subsumption’, for these writers, the autonomisation of capital from humanity through the use of AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) becomes increasingly a reality.

Publication of *Endnotes,* No.5 (The Passions and the Interests) which contains the most developed and extensive version of the ‘Error’ text. Available here: https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/error.pdf

2020

Also related to the ‘Error’ text is the publication of John Clegg and Rob Lucas, ‘Three Agricultural Revolutions’, (2020).

2022

Abolishing Capitalist Totality workshop and panel discussion on the 19th of May with Andrés Saenz De Sicilia, Dimitra Kotouza,

Anthony Iles, Elvin Brandhi, Eddie Prévost and Mattin at Cafe Oto, London.

2023

Søren Mau, in his book *Mute Compulsion* offers a critique of totalising readings of the concept of real subsumption and an innovative perspective on the relationship between subsumption and agriculture. Mau expands on the 'subsumption of nature' by exploring the changes in the production processes of agriculture through plant engineering, genetic codes of seeds, patent rights and GMO and their consequences such as the reduction of biodiversity, soil erosion, vast increases of greenhouse gas emissions and the massive global displacement of rural populations.

1
Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, (Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell), New York:Continuum, (1972) 2002, pp.188–243, p.193.

2
Richard Wolin, 'Introduction to the Discussion of "Need and Culture in Nietzsche"', *Constellations*, Vol.8, No.1, 2001, pp.127–129.

3
Cf. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought A Reader*, Oxford and Cambridge Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991 and Steve Wright, Storming Heaven (2004).

4
Steve Wright, *The Weight of the Printed Word: Text, Context and Militancy in Operaismo*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, p.34.

5
Raju J. Das, *Critical Reflections on Economy and Politics in India: A Class Theory Perspective*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p.17.

Bibliography

Aarons, K., 'No Selves To Abolish: Afropessimism, Anti-Politics and the End of the World' https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/no-selves-to-abolish-afropessimism-anti-politics-and-end-world

Adkins, Lisa, 'Speculative Futures in the Time of Debt', *The Sociological Review*, Vol.65, No.3, 2017, pp.448–462.

Adorno, Theodor W., *Minima Moralia*, London: Verso, 1974.

Adorno, Theodor W., *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* (Trans. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Adorno, Theodor W., 'Reflections on Class Theory', (Trans. Rodney Livingstone), in Rolf Tiedmann (Ed.), *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, Stanford Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2003, pp.93–110.

Adorno, Theodor W., 'Theses on Need' (1942), (Trans. Keston Sutherland), *Quid*, No.16, 2006, pp.40–44.

Adorno, Theodor W., 'Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory', (Trans. Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson and Chris O'Kane), *Historical Materialism,* Vol.26, No.1, 2018, 154–164.

Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, London and New York: Verso, 2005.

Althusser, Louis, Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London and New York: Verso, 1997.

Anderson, Perry, *Considerations on Western Marxism,* London and New York: Verso, 2016.

Art Against Cuts, *Bad Feelings*, London: Bookworks, 2015.

Arthur, Christopher J., *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Leiden; Brill, 2004.

Arthur, Christopher J., 'The Possessive Spirit of Capital: Subsumption/Inversion/Contradiction', in R. Bellofiore and R. Fineschi (Eds.), *Rereading Marx: New Perspectives after the Critical Edition*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.148-62.

Arruzza, Cinzia, 'Logic or History? The Political Stakes of Marxist-Feminist Theory', *Viewpoint*, 23 June, 2015, available: https://viewpointmag.com/2015/06/23/logic-or-history-the-political-stakes-of-marxist-feminist-theory/

Ashton, T.H., and C.H.E. Philpin (Eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Astarian, Bruno, 'Eléments sur la périodisation du MPC: histoire du capital, histoire des crises, histoire du communisme, Hic Salta,' 1998, http://patlotch.free.fr/text/1e9b5431-1140.html

Banajii, Jarius, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*, Leiden; Brill, 2010.

Basso, Luca, *Marx and Singularity: from the Early Writings to the Grundrisse,* (Trans. Arianna Bove), Chicago: Haymarket, (2008) 2013.

Bellofiore, Ricardo and Nicola Taylor (Eds.), *The Constitution of Capital: Essays on Volume 1 of Marx's Capital,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Bellofiore, Riccardo and Roberto Fineschi (Eds.), *Re-reading Marx: New Perspectives After the Critical Edition*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Bellofiore, Riccardo and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, 'The Neue Marx-Lektüre: Putting the Critique of Political Economy Back Into the Critique of Society', *Radical Philosophy*, No.189, Jan/Feb 2015.

Berman, Marshall, *Adventures in Marxism,* London and New York: Verso, 1999.

Bhattacharya, Tithi, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression,* London and New York: Pluto Press, 2017.

Bonefeld, Werner, Richard Gunn and Kosmas Psychopedis (Eds.), *Open Marxism, Vol.1: Dialectics and History*, London: Pluto, 1992.

Bonefeld, Werner (Ed.), *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-political Politics*, Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2003.

Bonefeld, Werner, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Bunyard, Tom (Ed.), *The Devil's Party*, London: Centre for Cultural Studies, 2009.

Brassier, Ray, *Nihil Unbound*: *Enlightenment and Extinction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Brassier, Ray, 'Concrete-in-Thought, Concrete-in-Act: Marx, Materialism and the Exchange Abstraction', Vol.5, No.1, 2018, 110-129. https://crisiscritique.org/2018h/brassier-v1.pdf

Brooks, Rodney A., *Cambrian Intelligence: The Early History of the New AI*, Massachusetts: Bradford Books/MIT Press, 1999.

Brown, Nathan, 'Red Years: Althusser's Lesson, Rancière's Error and the Real Movement of History', *Radical Philosophy,* No.170, Nov/Dec, 2011.

Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*, New York: Free Press, 1977.

Buck-Morss, Susan, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Bull, Malcolm, 'Vision and Totality', *New Left Review*, No.207, Sept/Oct, 1994.

Caffentzis, George, 'The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse', *Midnight Notes*, No.3, 1980.

Camatte, Jacques, *The Wandering of Humanity*, (Trans. Fredy Perlman), Detroit: Black and Red, 1975, available: https://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/wanhum/

Camatte, Jacques, *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*, New York: Autonomedia, 1995.

Camatte, Jacques, *Capital and Community: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx*, (Trans. David Brown), London: Unpopular Books, 1988.

Casarino, Cesare, Saree Makdisi and Rebecca E. Karl (Eds.), *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

Chanson, Vincent, Alexis Cukier and Frédéric Monferrand, 'Subsumption and Antagonism, *operaismo* and Critical Theory: The Missed Encounter that Shaped the Fate of Autonomous Marxism'. Draft transcript of a paper presented at the 2013 Historical Materialism conference in London. Available on Chris O' Kane's blog at: https://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/

Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979.

Clegg, John and Rob Lucas, 'Three Agricultural Revolutions', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.119, No.1, January, 2020.

Colletti, Lucio, *Marxism and Hegel,* London: New Left Books, 1973.

Colletti, Lucio, 'From Hegel to Marcuse', in *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society,* (Trans. John Merrington and Judith White), New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, pp.111-140.

Communist Research Cluster, *Communist Interventions: Revolutionary Feminisms*, Communist Interventions, Vol.3, 2015.

Conference of Socialist Economists, *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, London: Red Notes, 1979.

Conference of Socialist Economists. Microelectronics Group, *Microelectronics: Capitalist Technology and the Working Class*, London: CSE Books, 1980.

Crevier, Daniel, *AI: The Tumultuous History of the Search for Artificial Intelligence*, New York: Basic Books, 1993.

Dalla Costa, Mariarosa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press Ltd., 1972.

Danel, François, *Rupture dans la Théorie de la Revolution Textes: 1965–1975 Présentés par François Danel*, Paris: Senonevero, 2003.

Dauvé ,Gilles, *Le Mouvement Communiste,* No.2, an English translation is available, Gilles Dauvé, 'Capitalism and Communism', 1972, http://www.prole.info/texts/capitalismandcommunism.html

Dauvé, Gilles and Riff-Raff, 'Correspondence Between Parts of the Riff-Raff-collective and Gilles Dauvé (aka Jean Barrot)' *Riff-Raff ,* No.7, March, 2004, http://libcom.org/library/correspondence-between-parts-of-the-riff-raff-collective-and-gilles-dauve

Dauvé, Gilles (aka Jean Barrot), 'Leninism and the Ultra-Left', in *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*, 1968.

Dauvé, Gilles (aka Jean Barrot) and François Martin, *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*, London: Antagonism Press, (1968) 1997.

Davis, Angela, *Women, Race and Class*, New York: Penguin Random House, 1983.

Davis, Mike, 'Planet of the Slums', *New Left Review,* No.26, March–April, 2004, pp.5–34.

Day, Richard B. and Daniel Gaido*, Responses to Marx's* Capital*: From Rudolf Hilferding to Isaak Illich Rubin*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018.

Dean, Jodie, 'What Comes After Real Subsumption', 26 February, 2014, https://jdeanicite.typepad.com/i_cite/2014/02/what-comes-after-real-subsumption.html

Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), Zone Books. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1995.

Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Félix, Foucault, Michel, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* (Trans. Hurley, Robert, Seem, Mark and R. Lane Helen), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press edition, 1983.

Dussel, Enrique, *Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 1861-63*, (Trans. Yolanda Angulo), Ed. Fred Mosely, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Échanges et Mouvement, 'Refus du travail, faits et discussions', Paris, 1978, translated in 1979 in the UK under the title 'The Refusal of Work', https://libcom.org/article/refusal-work

Echeverría, Bolívar, 'La "forma natural" de la reproducción social', *Cuadernos Políticos*, No.41, p.33–46. 1984. English translation: 'Use-value: Ontology and Semiotics', (Trans.

Andrés Saenz De Sicilia and Sandro Brito Rojas), *Radical Philosophy*, No.188, November/December 2014, pp.24–38.

Echeverría, Bolívar, *La contradicción entre el valor y el valor de uso en El Capital de Karl Marx*, Mexico City: Itaca; 2010.

Echeverría, Bolívar, *Definición de la cultura,* Mexico City: Itaca, 2010.

Einstein, Carl, 'Totality', (Trans. Charles W. Haxthausen), *October*, Vol.107 (Winter, 2004), pp.115-121.

Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes*, No.2, April, 2010, http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/6

Endnotes, 'Communisation and Value Form Theory', *Endnotes*, No.2, April, 2010) http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-communisation-and-value-form-theory

Endnotes, 'Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture', *Endnotes,* No.3, September, 2013, https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/endnotes-spontaneity-mediation-rupture

Elson, Diane (Ed.), *Value: the Representation of Labour in Capitalism,* London & New York: Verso, (1979) 2015.

Erlich, Alexander, 'Preobrazhenski and the Economics of Soviet Industrialism', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol.64 no.1 (Feb 1950) pp.57–88.

Ferguson, Susan, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour and Social Reproduction*, London: Pluto Press, 2019.

Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative?* Winchester, UK : Zero books, 2009.

Foerster, Heinz von (Ed.), *Cybernetics: Circular Causal and Feedback Mechanisms in Biological and Social Systems*; Transactions of the Ninth Conference, 20-21 March, 1952.

Gangl, Manfred, 'The Controversy Over Friedrich Pollock's State Capitalism', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol.29 No.2, 2016, 23–41.

Garau, Michele, 'The Community of Capital: On Jacques Camatte', 24 April, 2022, https://illwill.com/the-community-of-capital

Gerovitch, Slava, '"Russian Scandals": Soviet Readings of American Cybernetics in the Early Years of the Cold War', *The Russian Review*, Vol.60, No.4 (2001) pp.545–568.

Gleeson, Jules Joanne, 'Abolitionism in the 21st Century: From Communization as the End of Sex, to Revolutionary Transfeminism', *Blind Field: A Jounral of Cultural Inquiry*, 7 August, 2017, https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/08/07/abolitionism-in-the-21st-century-from-communisation-as-the-end-of-sex-to-revolutionary-transfeminism/

Goldmann, Lucien, *Lukács and Heidegger*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

Gonzalez, Maya, 'Notes on the New Housing Question' in *Endnotes*, No.2, 2010.

Gonzalez, Maya, 'Communization and the Abolition of Gender', in Benjamin Noys (Ed.), *Communization and its Discontents*, New York: Minor Compositions, 2011.

Goldner, Loren, 'Communism is the Material Human Community: Amadeo Bordiga Today', 1995, https://libcom.org/article/communism-material-human-community-amadeo-bordiga-today-loren-goldner

Gunn, Richard, '"Recognition" in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', *Common Sense,* No.8, March, 1988.

Gupta, Dipanker, 'Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital: The Instance of Share-Cropping', *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol.15, No.39, September, 1980, pp.A98–A106.

Hansen, Bue Rübner,'The Kaleidoscope of Catastrophe – On the Clarities and Blind Spots of Andreas Malm', *Viewpoint*, 14 April, 2021, https://viewpointmag.com/2021/04/14/the-kaleidoscope-of-catastrophe-on-the-clarities-and-blind-spots-of-andre-as-malm/

Hardt , Michael, Negri, Antonio, *Empire,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Hardt, Michael and Paolo Virno, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Harvey, David, *The Limits to Capital*, London: Verso, 2006.

Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Trans. A.V. Miller), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Hegel, G.W.F., *Science of Logic*, (Trans. A.V. Miller), New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

Heinrich, Michael, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, (Trans. Alexander Locascio), London: Verso, 2009.

Heinrich, Michael, '"Capital" after MEGA: Discontinuities, Interruptions, and New Beginnings', *Crisis & Critique*, Vol.3, No.3 2016, pp.92–138.

Horkheimer, Max, *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, (Trans. Michael Shaw), New York: The Seabury Press, 1978.

Horkheimer, Max, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays,* (Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and others), New York: Continuum, (1937) 2002.

Horkheimer, Max, 'On the Sociology of Class Relations' (September-November 1943) (Trans. Todd Cronan), http://nonsite.org/the-tank/max-horkheimer-and-the-sociology-of-class-relations

James, Robin, 'Toxic Women and "Absolute Subsumption"', 28 February, 2014, https://www.its-her-factory.com/2014/02/toxic-women-and-absolute-subsumption

Jameson, Frederic, *Representing Capital: A Commentary on Volume One*, London: Verso, 2014.

Jay, Martin, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Karatani, Kojin, *Transcritique*, (Trans. Sabu Kohso), Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003.

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781, 1787], (Trans. Paul Guyer and Allan W. Wood), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kautzer, Chad, 'Marx's Influence on the Early Frankfurt School', in M.J. Thompson (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Kluge, Alexander, and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy,* (Trans. Richard Langston et al.), New York: Zone Books, 2014.

Krahl, Hans-Jürgen, *Konstitution und Klassenkampf. Zur historischen Dialektik von bürgerlicher Emanzipation und proletarischer Revolution. Schriften und Reden 1966–1970*, Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, (1969) 1971.

Krahl, Hans-Jürgen, 'The Political Contradiction in Adorno's Critical Theory', *Telos,* Autumn, 1974, No.21 pp.164-167.

Kline, Ronald, 'Cybernetics, Automata Studies, and the Dartmouth conference on artificial intelligence' *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing,* Vol.33, No.4, 2010, pp.5–16.

Kotouza, Dimitra, *Surplus Citizens: Struggle and Nationalism in the Greek Crisis*, London and New York: Pluto Press, 2019.

Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, London: Verso Books, 2018

Lefebvre, Henri, *The Survival of Capitalism,* (Trans. Frank Bryant), New York: Allison & Busby; St Martins Press, (1973) 1976.

Light, Jennifer S., *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War*, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Lispector, Clarice, *Near to the Wild Heart*, Massachusetts: New Directions Publishing, 1990.

Liu, Joyce C.H., & Viren Murthy (Eds.), *East-Asian Marxisms and Their Trajectories*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Lonzi, Carla, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', 1970, available: https://my-blackout.com/2020/11/18/carla-lonzi-lets-spit-on-hegel/

Lotringer, Sylvia and Christian Marazzi (Eds.), *Autonomia: Post-Political Writings*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins,* Princeton; Oxford Princeton University Press, 2015.

Lukács, György, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, London: Merlin Press, 1968.

Lloyd, David, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics*, New York: Fordham, 2019.

Lynley, Matthew, 'Why iRobot's Colin Angle Thinks the Smart Home Starts with a Robot Vacuum', *The Verge*, 7 November, 2016, https://techcrunch.com/2016/11/06/why-irobots-colin-angle-thinks-the-smart-home-starts-with-a-robot-vacuum/

Macherey, Pierre, 'The Productive Subject', October, 2015, https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productive-subject/

Marcuse, Herbert, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1964.

Martin, Stewart, *Adorno and the Problem of Philosophy*, PhD Thesis, Middlesex University, 2002.

Martin, Stewart, 'Pedagogy of Human Capital', *Mute*, Vol.2, No.8, 2008, pp.32–45.

Marx, Karl, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (Trans. Joseph O'Malley), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Marx, K., *Grundrisse*, (trans. Martin Nicolaus), London: Penguin, 1973.

Marx, Karl, *Un chapitre inédit du Capital*, (Trans. Roger Dangeville), Paris, Union Générale d'Éditions (10-18), 1971.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology,* (Ed. and Trans. C.J. Arthur), London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984.

Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, *Volume One,* (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London: Penguin, 1992.

Marx, Karl, 'The Results of the Immediate Process of Production' in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, *Volume One*, (Trans. Ben Fowkes), London: Penguin, 1992.

Marx, Karl, *Grundrisse,* (Trans. Martin Nicolaus), London: Penguin Books, 1993.

Marx, Karl , *Das Kapital 1.1 Sechstes Kapitel: Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses. Die Zusammenfassung des Ersten Bandes des "Kapitals"*, preface Rolf Hecker, Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 2009.

Mascat, Jamila, 'Hegel and the Advent of Modernity: A Social Ontology of Abstraction', *Radical Philosophy*, Vol.2. No.1 February, 2018.

Meiksins Wood, Ellen, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, London and New York: Verso, 2017.

Meiksins Wood, Ellen, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical*

Materialism, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Mesing, Dave, 'Hans-Jürgen Krahl, For and Against Critical Theory: Introduction', 14 April, 2018, *Viewpoint,* https://viewpointmag.com/2018/04/14/hans-jugen-krahl-for-and-against-critical-theory-introduction/

Millar, James R., 'A Note on Primitive Accumulation in Marx and Preobrazhensky', *Soviet Studies* Vol.30, No.3, July 1978, pp.384–93.

Moseley, Fred, *Money and Totality: A Macro-monetary Interpretation of Marx's Logic in Capital and the End of the 'Transformation Problem'*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Moten, Fred, *In the Break The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Mattick, Paul, *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, London: Merlin Press, 1978.

Murray, Patrick, *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016.

Negarestani, Reza, *Intelligence and Spirit*, Falmouth: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2018.

Negarestani, Reza, 'On the Revolutionary Earth: A Dialectic in Territopic Materialism', *Dark Materialism Conference,* 2011.

Négation, 'Le Proletariat comme destructeur du travail', *Négation*, No.1, 1972. Republished as part of the collection, *Histoire critique de l'ultra-gauche*, Ed. Roland Simon, Marseille: Éditions Senonevero, 2015.

Négation, 'Lip et la contre-revolution autogestionnaire', *Négation*, No.3, 1973. Translated as Négation, *Lip and the Self-managed Counter-revolution*, (Trans. Nicolas Will, Peter J. Rachleff and Alan Wallach), Detroit: Black & Red, (1973) 1975.

Negri, Antonio, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons from the Grundrisse*, New York and London: Autonomedia and Pluto Press, 1984.

Negri, Antonio, 'Crisi dello Stato-piano: comunismo e organizzazione rivoluzionaria' *Potere operaio*, No.45, 25 September, 1971. Available in English as 'Crisis of the Planner State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization', in *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects, 1967-83*, London: Red Notes, 1988, pp.94–148.

Negri, Antonio, 'Workers' Party Against Work' (1973) (Trans. Francesca Novello and Timothy S. Murphy) in *Books for Burning*.

Negri, Antonio, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, (Trans. Arianna Bove, Ed Emery, Francesca Novello, and Timothy Murphy (Translations editor)), New York, NY: Verso, 2005.

Noys, Benjamin, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Noys, Benjamin (Ed.), *Communization and its Discontents*, New York: Minor Compositions, 2011.

Noys, Benjamin, 'Abandoning Accelerationism? Two Exits', Accelerationism Workshop, Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster, 23 May 2014, available, https://www.academia.edu/7167970/Abandoning_Accelerationism_Two_Exits

O'Kane, Chris, 'Fetishistic Concrete Abstraction, Social Constitution and Social Domination in Henri Lefebvre's Writings on Everyday Life, Cities and Space', *Capital & Class*, Vol.42, No.2, 2018.

Osborne, Peter, 'The Reproach of Abstraction', *Radical Philosophy,* No.127, September/October 2004.

Patterson, Orlando, *Slavery and Social Death*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Perlman, Fredy, 'The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism', Detroit: Black & Red, 1985.

Peters, Benjamin, *How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet,* Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016.

Pollock, Friedrich, 'State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations' (1941) in Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt (Eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* New York: Continuum, (1978) 1990.

Pollock, Friedrich,,'Is National Socialism a New Order', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Vol.9, No.3, 1941, pp.440–455.

Postone, Moishe and Barbara Brick, 'Critical Pessimism and the Limits of Traditional Marxism' , *Theory and Society,* Vol.11, No.5, September, 1982, pp.617-658.

Postone, Moishe, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Rabinbach, Anson G.,'Toward a Marxist Theory of Fascism and National Socialism: A Report on Developments in West Germany'. *New German Critique*, No.3 (1974), pp.127–53.

Read, Jason, *The Micro-politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

Read, Jason, *The Production of Subjectivity: Marx and Philosophy,* Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021.

R.L., 'Inextinguishable Fire, Ferguson and Beyond', *Mute*, 17 November 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/inextinguishable-fire-ferguson-and-beyond.

Robinson, Cedric, *Black Marxism*: *The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, London: Penguin, (1983) 2021.

Robinson, Idris, 'How it Might Should Be Done?', 2020, (video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQeW7RPkCZ-Q&t=2679s Transcript, Ill Will Editions, https://illwilleditions.com/how-it-might-should-be-done-2/

Rosdolsky, Roman, 'Comments on the Method of Marx's Capital and Its Importance for Contemporary Marxist Scholarship', (Trans. David Bathrick), (introduction Anson Rabinbach), *New German Critique* No.3 (Autumn, 1974), pp.62–72.

Rosdolsky, Roman, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'*, (Trans. Peter Burgess), London: Pluto, (1968) 1977.

Rose, Gillian, *The Melancholy Science,* Verso: London, 1978.

Roth, Karl-Heinz, *Die 'andere' Arbeiterbewegung*, Trikont: Munich, 1974.

Rubin, Isaak, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, (Trans. Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman), Detroit: Black and Red, Detroit, 1972.

Ruda, Frank, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Ruda, Frank, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism,* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

Saenz De Sicilia, Andrés, 'Subsumption', in *Handbook of Marxism,* S. R. Farris, B. Skeggs & A. Toscano (eds), London: Sage, 2021.

Saenz De Sicilia, Andrés, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, PhD thesis, Kingston University, 2016.

Santini, Francesco, *Apocalypse and Survival: Reflections on Giorgio Cesarano's Book, Critica dell'utopia capitale, and the Experience of the Radical Communist Current in Italy*, 2013, https://libcom.org/book/export/html/45532

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, (Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith), London: Verso, (1960) 2004.

Screamin' Alice. 'On the Periodisation of the Capitalist Class Relation'. *Sic*, No.1 (November 2011), 171–96. *Sic*, *International Journal for Communisation*, http://www.sicjournal.org/

Shortall, Felton C. *The Incomplete Marx*, Aldershot: Avebury, 1994.

Simmel, Georg, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1971.

Simmel, Georg, *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, (Ed. and Trans. Donald N. Levine), Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Simon, Henri, '1958–1998: Communism in France: Socialisme ou Barbarie, ICO and Échanges', https://libcom.org/library/communism-france-sob-ico-Échanges

Simon, Roland, *Histoire critique de l'ultragauche,* Marseille and Avignon: Senonevero and Les Chemins non tracés, 2015.

Skillman, Gilbert L., 'The Puzzle of Marx's Missing "Results": A Tale of Two Theories', *History of Political Economy*, Vol.45 No.3, 2013, pp.475–504.

Sohn-Rethel, Alfred, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, (Trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel), Leiden: Brill, (1978) 2021.

Sparks, Amber, *The Unfinished World: And Other Stories*, New York: Liveright, 2016.

Sriram, Sami, Yimin Dai, Sean Rui Xiang Tan, Nirupam Roy, and Jun Han,'Spying with your Robot Vacuum Cleaner: eavesdropping via lidar sensors' in *Proceedings of the 18th Conference on Embedded Networked Sensor Systems*, (2020), pp.354–367.

Stalin, Joseph V., *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, Maryland: Wildside Press, 2008.

Streeck, Wolfgang, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*, Verso: London and New York 2016.

Tadiar, Neferti X. M. 'Life-Times in Fate Playing', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.111 No.4, (2012) pp.783–802.

Tafuri, Manfredo, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, Cambridge: Mass.: MIT Press, (1973) 1976.

Théorie Communiste, 'Self-organisation is the First Act of the Revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome*',* 2005, http://meeting.communisation.net/stuff-for-meeting/article/self-organisation-is-the-first-act.

Théorie Communiste, 'The Present Moment', 2011, https://libcom.org/library/present-moment-theorie-communiste

Thompson, E.P., *The Poverty of Theory*, London: Merlin, 1996.

Tomba, Massimiliano, 'Historical Temporalities of Capital: An Anti-Historicist Perspective', *Historical Materialism*, No.17, 2009.

Tomšič, Samo, *The Capitalist Unconscious,* London and New York: Verso, 2015.

Toscano, Alberto, 'Ad Hominem: Antinomies of Radical Philosophy', *Filozofski vestnik*, Volume/Letnik XXIX, No.2, 2008, pp.137–153.

Toscano, Alberto, 'Seeing it Whole: Staging Totality in Social Theory and Art', *The Sociological Review*, Vol.60, No.1, 2012.

Toscano, Alberto and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, Winchester, UK; Washington D.C. : Zero Books, 2015

Toscano, Alberto, 'Notes on Late Fascism', February 2017, http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/notes-late-fascism

Tronti, Mario, 'Factory and Society', (Trans. Guio Jacinto), (1962) 2013, available: https://operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com/2013/06/13/factory-and-society/

Tronti, Mario, 'The Autonomy of the Political', *Viewpoint magazine*, (Trans. Andrew Anastasi, Sara R. Farris, and Peter D. Thomas), 26 February, (1972) 2020, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2020/02/26/the-autonomy-of-the-political/

Tronti, Mario, *Workers and Capital*, (Trans. David Broder), London; New York: Verso, 2019.

Vercellone, Carlo 2007, 'From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism', *Historical Materialism*, Vo15, 13–36.

Vishmidt, Marina and Neil Gray, 'The Economy of Abolition/Abolition of the Economy – Interview', *Variant*, No.42, 2011, pp.7–11.

Vishmidt, Marina. 'The Paradox of Abolition / Le paradoxe de l'auto-abolition: un exercise de cartographie', *May*, No.16, 2016, pp. 25-45.

Vishmidt, Marina, *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital,* Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Watson, Bill 'Counter-planning on the Shop Floor', 1971 available here: https://libcom.org/article/counter-planning-shop-floor-bill-watson

Wiener, Norbert, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1954.

Wittig, Monique, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Boston, Ma.: Beacon Press, 2002.

Wilderson III, Frank B. and Ill Will, '"We're Trying to Destroy the World" – Anti-Blackness and Police Violence After Ferguson: An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson III', Chicago: Ill Will Editions, 2011.

Wilderson III, Frank B., *Afropessimism,* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020.

Williams, Alex, and Nick Srnicek, *#Accelerate Manifesto: For an Accelerationist Politics*, Mexico City: Gato Negro Ediciones, 2016.

Wright, Steve, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto Press, 2002.

Yokokohji, Yasuyoshi. 'The Use of Robots to Respond to Nuclear Accidents: Applying the Lessons of the Past to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station', *Annual Review of Control, Robotics, and Autonomous Systems,* No.4 (2021), pp.681–710.

Index

10/18 (Union Générale d'Éditions, UGE), 83, 125n1, 214n13, 539, 15-M, 44, 317–319, 324n18

abolition, 19, 44–45, 52n37, 90–91, 94, 103, 110, 121, 129, 132, 139, 168, 185, 200–201, 207–8, 211–212, 218, 228, 235, 301–302, 329, 333, 338, 343, 345, 352, 404n88, 425–440, 468, 472, 474–477, 485–487, 490–495, 497, 499, 502, 503n4, *see also* Self-abolition
absolute surplus-value, 63n1, 76, 89, 176–180, 334, 357
abstraction, 345, 199–208, 211–236, 258, 265, 268, 276, 279-281, 328, 330, 335-339, 344, 359, 369, 387, 412, 428–432, 436–439, 441–460, 464–483, 500-501 *See also* Real abstraction
Afropessimism, Afropessimist, 18, 19, 45, 49n4, 52n37, 425–6, 431, 442, 446, 548n1 and n5
agriculture, 178, 236, 297n21, 298n23, 479, 544, 560
alien, 123, 130, 188, 199, 211, 359, 361, 370, 579
alienation; alienated; alienate, 29, 32, 37, 42, 100–101, 122–123, 129–130, 144, 164, 188, 190, 199–204, 223–224, 325–349, 361, 365–368, 370, 383, 387, 397n10, 410, 416, 421, 460n26, 454, 472–473, 503n7, 539
algorithm 47–48, 144,
Althusser, Louis, 28, 41, 188, 274, 275, 276–8, 545, 548
Archinoir, 527
Arthur, Christopher J., 31, 52n35, 209, 556, 557
artificial intelligence, 18, 353, 355–356, 359–363
Arruzza, Cinzia, 439, 440n11
Astarian, Bruno, 209, 523n2
aufheben, 32, 52n35
aufhebung, 44, 447, 467, 485, 486, 497
autonomy, 42, 79, 120, 165, 177, 184, 190, 196, 210, 212, 222, 228, 238n3, 265, 266, 295, 307–315, 323n9, 327, 333, 382, 392, 394, 407–404, 450, 453–7, 512, 534
Autonomia, 197, 273, 315, 554–555
automation, 37, 75, 97–98, 253, 362, 496
autonomisation, 367, 390, 559
autoreduction; self-reduction, 263, 266

Barrot, Jean *See* Gilles Dauvé, 126n18, 300, 305, 312
biopower, 28, 389
Black & Red, 36, 50n10, 74, 238n8, 303, 482n10, 532, 545
Blanc, Dominique 209, 300, 323n4
Bloch, Ernst, 373, 399n26
Boggs, James, 101, 125n7
Bologna, Sergio, 43, 249–250, 261–264, 267, 269n25, 271n79
Bordiga, Amadeo, 25, 50n14, 74, 81n2, 95, 219, 297n21, 300, 313, 315–316, 536–538, 545
Bou Ali, Nadia, 42, 325–350, 397n10
Brown, David. 50n14, 81n9, 126n17, 399n24, 551

Camatte, Jacques, 23, 25, 31, 32, 36, 37, 46, 50, 51n20, 57, 73–76, 80, 81, 126n17, 217, 219–226, 238n8 and 9, 239n24, 274, 273, 274, 284, 296n15, 297n16, 307, 315, 316, 353, 354, 372, 374, 376, 381, 383, 385, 390, 399n24, 400n40, 403n74, 404n85, 470, 472, 482n10, 536–540, 546, 548, 551, 553, 554, 556–558
Cahiers de l'ISEA, 538
Chanson, Vincent, 43, 244, 245, 251, 268n9
Chernyshevsky, Nikolai, 21, 50n8, 408
class, 18, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 36, 39, 43, 46, 47, 51n25, 52n30, 57, 74, 76, 78, 80, 81n2, 88-100, 103, 105-124, 131, 136, 144, 149, 161, 164, 166, 171n11, 173n30, 175-178, 181-465, 474-497, 517, 525, 531-538,

543-549, 552, 554, 556, 557, 561n5
Colletti, Lucio, 383–385, 402n66
Collu, Gianni, 81n4 and 7, 126n17, 376, 383, 400n40, 540, 546, 548
Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT), 125n6
Collettivo di Lotta Femminista, 541
communism, 37, 42, 51n16, 74, 77, 81, 95, 107, 117, 121, 124, 126n15, 127n21, 129, 130, 136, 137, 141, 143, 144, 170, 174, 176, 185, 197, 2007–210, 212, 216, 223, 224, 234, 236, 240n45 and 46, 268n4, 275, 286, 309, 310, 312, 313, 322, 323n2 and 5, 324n11 and 12, 336, 378, 380, 385, 392, 397n10, 416, 443, 465, 468, 470, 474, 481n3, 485, 487, 489, 490, 493, 494, 496–500, 509, 512, 513, 517, 541, 545, 548, 552, 562
communisation, 19, 32–34, 43–45, 52n37, 81n8, 197, 209, 211–213, 217, 218, 225, 226, 227, 237, 239n23, 240n30 and 36, 300, 302, 304, 308, 310, 312, 315, 316, 322, 326, 338, 346, 385, 405, 429, 430, 437, 438, 443, 458, 465, 475, 483n19, 485, 497, 505
councils; councilism; workers councils, council communism, 25, 73, 80, 93–95, 99, 112, 114, 120–122, 126n20, 175, 186–187, 192–194, 302–305, 312, 315, 317, 323n6
crisis, 33, 73, 77–9, 81n8, 105, 136–7, 177–9, 183–6, 196, 210, 220, 246, 256–9, 262–3, 266–8, 303–4, 317–20, 333, 380, 384, 508, 512, 535, 541, 549.
Cuadernos políticos, 38, 57, 59n3 and n4, 61, 525, 551
Cukier, Alexis, 43, 244, 268n9

Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, 264, 272n94, 536, 542
Dangeville, Roger, 25, 27, 51n20, 125n1and4, 127n22, 137n2, 539, 541
Davis, Angela, 352
Davis, Mike 555
Dauvé, Gilles, 33, 74, 81n4, 127n21, 209, 300, 305–307, 309, 312, 316, 317, 323n9, 324n11 and 13 *See also* Jean Barrot
Debord, Guy, 274, 301, 368, 531, 538, 546
domination, 27, 36, 40, 41, 75–79, 83–85, 87–91, 93, 94, 96, 100, 101, 105, 109, 112, 119, 123, 125n1, 129, 134, 137n2, 142, 144, 148, 163–166, 168, 169, 176, 180, 202, 245, 251, 270m.70, 287, 288, 301, 304, 334, 346, 365, 366, 371, 372, 378–380, 382, 392, 399n24, 400n30, 401n43 and 44, 402n56, 404n88, 409, 420, 421, 422, 424n13, 427, 443, 448, 455, 460n26, 466, 472, 501, 502, 503n7, 506, 535, 540. 544–546, 548, 550, 552–554
Dussel, Enrique, 38, 551

Echeverría, Bolívar, 26, 37–39, 57, 58, 59n3 and 4, 172n14 and 18, 530, 551, 558
Échanges et Mouvement, 81n7, 300, 303, 307, 316, 323n.10 *See also Informations et correspondances ouvrières*; Simon, Henri
ecology; ecological; ccologist, 302–303, 309, 355
ecological catastrophe, 17, 508
economy; economics, 40, 46, 57, 94, 100, 112, 118, 123, 149, 151, 166, 173n28, 185, 199, 203, 214n1, 238n9, 253, 255–257, 259, 260, 261, 263, 265–266, 277–278, 282, 289–291, 311, 314, 320, 327–328, 340–341, 345, 351, 352, 354–356, 365, 367, 373–375, 378 –379, 388, 398n18, 400n30 and n32, 405n89, 443, 465, 481n3, 531–532, 537 *See also* libidinal economy
Endnotes, 30, 32, 33, 35, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 51n25, 51n25, 52n29, 214n2, 217, 2019, 220, 224–228, 230–234, 239, 240, 243, 248, 266n7, 270n58, 272n96, 283, 296n14, 297n21, 307, 326, 328, 329, 332, 335, 336, 338, 339, 348, 386, 399n23, 402n65, 403n76, 405n98, 428–430, 440n4, 459n22, 465, 466, 470, 471, 474, 475, 477, 495, 503n4, 505, 518n1, 556–559
ETA, 34
Etcétera, 314–316, 324n16
exchange-value, 83, 85, 87, 88, 88, 97, 113, 134, 135, 222, 330, 341, 342, 345, 388, 390, 478, 479, 501, 553

factory, 43, 94–97, 107, 112–113, 115–121, 133, 135, 145, 180, 186,

241–272, 291, 304, 414, 478, 480, 536, 542, 545, 550, 581, 582, *See also* social factory
fascism, 17, 96, 109, 111, 158-159, 238n5, 250, 301, 374, 400n32, 418–419, 533–534
finance; financial crisis, 17, 33, 97, 182, 250, 256–257, 259, 262–263, 267, 270n54, 272n106, 341, 346, 371, 377, 390, 549
Fisher, Mark, 371–372
feminism, 52n32 and 37, 213, 264, 352, 434 *See also* Marxist-feminism and transfeminism
Frankfurt School, 26, 27, 40, 188, 365, 373, 374, 377, 379–381, 387, 391, 393, 397n7 and 9, 398n18 and 20, 399n26, 400–403, 405n89, 406n99, 420, 531, 534, 535, 549, 552, 553, 567, *See also* Institut für Sozialforschung

gender, 18, 20, 45, 52n37, 212, 213, 240, 303, 321, 381, 395, 426, 428, 429, 430, 432, 434, 435, 439, 440n7, 458, 473, 476, 482, 483, 494–496
gender abolition *See* abolition and gender
Gramsci, Antonio, 249, 275, 292, 398n11, 541
Goldner, Loren, 75, 81n2, 297n21, 545
Gonzalez, Maya, 264, 270n58, 272n96, 428, 429, 435, 440n8, 445
Grundrisse (Marx), 25, 62, 83, 399n24, 534, 536, 539, 546, 548, 549, 551
Guillaume, Pierre, 300, 312, 323

Harvey, David, 244, 248, 262, 271n81
heaven, 61, 440
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 155, 171n12, 173n29, 240n33, 259, 276, 292, 296n5, 298n24, 437, 481n4
Heinrich, Michael. 51n27, 543
heteronomy, 413–417
Hilberseimer, Ludwig, 259–260
housework, 264, 352, 354, 372, 549

India, 26, 477, 543–544, 557
Indignados See 15-M
Informations et correspondances ouvrières (ICO), 104, 106, 125n4, 126n8 and 17, 189, 193, 214n9, 300, 304–312, 323n5, 541
See also Simon, Henri
Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main); Frankfurt Institute; Institute of Social Research, 373, 399n26, 403n67 and 68, 531, 532 *See also* Frankfurt School
Institut des Sciences Mathématiques et Économiques Appliquées (ISEA) see *Cahiers de l'ISEA*, 538
Invariance, 25, 27, 36, 37, 41, 50n14, 81n9, 95, 126n17, 238n8, 307, 315, 536–540, 554

James, Selma, 264, 535, 536, 542
Jameson, Fredric, 17, 49. 261, 271n77, 274, 372, 531

Kant, Immanuel, 21, 22, 27, 39, 48, 148–156, 160, 166, 167, 171n10 and 12, 230, 231, 238n3, 269n16, 272n107, 366, 392, 405n94, 431, 454, 459n25, 483n14, 505, 533, 549, 558, 558
KAPD (German Communist Workers Party), 73, 95–96
Kautzer, Chad, 397n9, 398n18, 398–399n20, 403n68
Keynes, John Maynard, Keynesianism, 252–253, 259, 267, 269n35, 277, 373–374
Kotouza, Dimitra, 44, 52n33, 444, 447, 464–483, 484–503

La Guerre Sociale, 209, 300, 315
La Vielle Taupe, 81n4, 310–312, 323n4
Lacan, Jacques, 42, 327, 330, 330–346, 349n54
Lefebvre, Henri, 25, 51n17, 243, 244, 251, 254–262, 269n30 and 40, 270
Lenin, Vladimir, 21, 23, 126n12 and n14, 252, 311, 316, 404n80, 408 *See also* Marxism-Leninism, Leninism
Leninism, 46, 116, 118, 120, 126n14 and n18, 184, 186, 194, 275, 302, 305–306, 310, 316 *See also* Marxism-Leninism
Libidinal Economy, 329–330, 346,
Lip factory, 137, 303, 544–5
Lotta Continua, 234
Lotta Femminista, 541, 542–543
Lukács, György, 73, 274, 275, 279, 283, 296n3, 316, 368, 369, 383, 384, 398n11, 399n26, 404n80, 450, 453, 459n15, 512, 531

Mau, Søren, 560

Maffi, Bruno, 26, 50n15, 536, 538, 539, 542, 546, 546
Marcuse, Herbert, 188, 339, 378–380, 401n51 and n52, 402n66
Marx, Karl, 21–32, 38–51, 56–63, 73, 75, 83, 87, 92, 109, 116–120, 125–127, 137, 140–149, 153–173, 199, 200, 204–209, 212, 214–222, 236, 238, 242, 243, 247, 252, 267–269, 271, 272, 274–276, 281–286, 292, 296–298, 315, 327, 330–347, 357, 365–482, 496, 510, 530–559
Marxian; Marxism; Western Marxism; Marxist; Marxology, 19–61, 83, 109–148, 216–222, 238, 243, 268–276, 282, 292, 296–309, 316, 327, 330–345, 358, 359, 365–482, 496, 497, 506, 512, 531, 535, 538, 547, 549, 551, 553, 554
Marx-Engels Institute, Moscow, 25, 531
Marxist-feminism, 45, 440n11, 52n37, 213, 264, 352, 425–440
Marxism-Leninism 118, 120, 126n14, 194, 305, 316
Matériaux pour l'intervention, 115–116
Mattick, Paul, 379–38
Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación (MIL), 310–317
Monferrand, Frédéric, 43, 244, 268n9
Moten, Fred, 425–440, 445, 447
Monsieur Dupont, 309, 324
Murray, Patrick, 31, 163, 242, 268n2, 555
Mute, 44, 52n33, 215, 264, 284, 406n104, 458n6, 464, 482n9, 484, 503n4, 556
mystification, 77, 220–223, 253, 370–371, 373, 375, 386, 458n5, 470

nature, 26, 38, 61, 122–123, 129, 136, 143, 153, 156, 158, 159, 160, 163, 165, 172n14 and n15
negation, 19, 27, 44–45, 78, 109, 113–114, 123, 124, 136, 141, 152, 166, 168, 174–175, 184, 187–188, 194–198, 236, 329, 378, 392, 396, 414, 418–419, 426, 432, 442, 445, 456–457, 467–469, 477, 479, 485–487, 493, 496, 515, Determinate negation, 333, 338, 428, 436, 467, Self-negation, 174–175, 185, 188, 194–198, 477, 542, *See also* Self-abolition
Négation, 35–37, 41, 72–81, 82–127, 128–137, 193, 195, 209, 303, 313, 443, 527, 528, 541, 544–545
negationism, 323n4
Negri, Antonio, 25–29, 31–33, 41, 43, 51n16, 57, 145, 242–243, 248, 252–253, 259, 266, 268n4, 274, 372, 389, 541
Neue Marx-Lektüre; New Reading of Marx, 26, 404n81, 537–538, 552

Occupy, 34
Operaismo, 41, 43, 111–116, 241–273, 541, 542–543, 555, *See also* workerism

Pannekoek, Anton, 95, 300
Panzieri, Ranziero, 43, 244, 251–253, 269n29
Perlman, Fredy, 50, 532 *See also* Black & Red
plan, planning, 125n4, 189–190, 193–194, 243–245, 251–255, 258, 301, 394–395, 543 *See also* planner state
planner state, 51n15, 243–244, 251–255, 262, 268n4, 541
Pollock, Friedrich, 373–379, 397n7, 399n26, 399n29, 400n40, 405n89, 419
Postone, Moishe 209, 409, 534–535
Potere Operaio, 111–116, 542–543
primitive accumulation, 41, 50n10, 291, 297-298n23, 329, 370, 398n19, 510, 549
Primo Maggio, 249
Prometheanism, 33–34
psychoanalysis, 337, 331, 339-3421, 344, 345, 349n54, 381, 349n24

Quaderni Rossi, 245, 249–250, 536

Rachleff, Peter, 195
racket; political rackets, 80, 110–116, 121, 376–377
Read, Jason, 51n23, 554
real abstraction, 45, 216, 230, 232, 237, 238n6, 339, 429, 431, 432, 437, 448, 452-456, 471, 477, 487, 500, 501, 548
Reeve, Charles, 192-195, 214
refusal of work; Work refusal, 78, 80, 81n7, 102, 111–112, 114, 132, 136, 175, 184–186, 188–199, 203–204, 210, 253, 302–303, 313, 542, 548, 549
regressive social necessity, 37–38, 60–63, *See also* Echeverría, Bolívar

reification, 45, 219, 283, 365, 368-370, 383, 384, 388, 397n4, 398, 442, 450, 451, 455, 459, 471, 512, 529, 531
relative surplus-value, 46, 58, 76, 89, 176-183, 333, 358, 370, 459n21, 545
reproduction, 20, 22, 26, 43, 43, 46, 51n23, 58, 61, 75, 77, 78, 99, 104, 105, 133, 158, 159, 161, 167-169, 172n14, 176-189, 196, 209-211, 218, 224, 227-229, 232-235, 239n29, 243, 244, 247-249, 254, 255, 264-267, 269n40, 283-285, 296n12, 302, 313-321, 333, 334, 336, 346, 372, 373, 381, 382, 386, 388, 391, 393, 395, 396, 430, 432-438, 459n21, 469, 471, 472, 475, 483n17, 506, 512, 514, 515, 531, 542, 551
'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' (Marx), 23, 50n14, 51n24, 125n1, 242, 243, 268n8, 297n15, 397n2, 530, 541, 547
Riff-Raff, 300
Rivolta Femminile, 541
Robinson, Idris, 50n8
Rosdolsky, Roman, 24, 25, 38, 50n12, 536, 546, 547
Rosés Cordovilla, Sergi, 312, 313, 324
Rülhe, Otto, 120
Rubel, Maximilien, 25, 538
Rubin, Isaak, 402, 531, 532

sabotage, 98–99, 106–107, 189–193, 196, 302
self-abolition, 19, 31, 37, 130–1, 195–196, 230–231 351 392, 425–440, 441–460, 474–477, 495 *See also* abolition; self-negation
self-management, 36, 88, 99, 109, 125n6, 137, 175, 184, 301, 544
self-negation *See* abolition and self-abolition, 175, 185, 188-198, 477, 542
Simon, Henri, 192, 315, 323n5
Simon, Roland 37, 124–137, 524 *See also* Théorie Communiste
Situationist International (*Internationale Situationniste, SI*), 73, 81, 305, 310, 323n6, 387, 404n79
society, 22, 23, 26, 30, 37, 41, 45, 50n6, 52n30, 62, 78, 80, 81n8, 84, 87, 88, 90, 93, 96, 100, 112, 112, 123, 126n15, 129, 137, 141, 145, 146, 154, 157-160, 165, 169, 170, 175, 179, 181, 183, 185, 188, 193, 199, 2014, 207, 209, 211, 212, 223, 224, 226, 235, 236, 238n6n9, 242, 245, 247, 249, 253, 261, 265-269, 275-295, 298n24, 301, 321, 325-329, 332, 335, 339, 346, 355, 358, 359, 367, 368, 372, 376, 378, 379, 381, 383, 385, 387, 390, 393, 394, 397n9, 398n18, 401n52, 403n68, 404n81n87, 405n89, 406n100, 409, 419, 421, 436, 440n7, 449, 450, 453, 458n9, 459n17, 465, 466, 469, 471-477, 480, 481n3, 482n5, 483n14-15, 489, 493, 500, 508, 511, 514, 518n1, 531, 535-541, 546, 549, 552
social democracy, 36, 48, 118, 122, 175, 443, 515
social factory, 43, 242-250, 253, 256, 259, 260, 262, 264-268, 536, 542, 554, 555
social form, 20-22, 31, 147, 158, 162, 163, 165, 167, 168, 170, 203-205, 234-236, 237, 268n2, 275, 280, 296n11, 338, 409, 420, 422, 424n13, 429, 430, 460n26, 465-467, 469, 471-473, 478, 485, 487, 491, 493, 508, 513, 516, 548, 549
Socialisme ou Barbarie, 81n4, 300, 304, 323n5
Sohn-Rethel, Alfred, 216, 238n6, 369, 398n15, 404n80, 449, 458n11, 448-449,
Soler, Santi, 312–313, 315–316
strikes, 98, 99, 108, 196, 213, 321
Spain, 34, 44, 119, 300, 301, 313, 314, 317-319, 323, 323n3, 324n20
state, 26, 33, 42, 48, 57, 79, 91, 94, 100, 118
submission, 26, 27, 51n20, 341, 546,
surplus-value, 46, 58, 63n1, 76, 83, 85, 86, 89, 96, 109, 134, 142, 144, 154, 162, 163, 173n30, 176-183, 194, 207, 226, 251-253, 255, 257, 267, 330-334, 339, 342, 343, 347, 349n54, 357-358, 367, 370, 372, 374, 376, 390, 392, 394, 399n24, 430, 459n21, 545, 550, 557, 558
Sottomissione see Submission
Soumission, *see* Submission

Tafuri, Manfredo, 244, 258-261, 270-271
Théorie Communiste (TC), 31, 32, 33, 37, 41, 42, 46, 52n30n35, 239n29, 243, 274, 284, 285, 296n12, 297, 307, 321, 324n21, 326, 328, 329, 332-339, 346, 348, 386, 403n73, 459n21-22, 477, 542, 556, 557

Tiqqun, 50n8, 226
Toscano, Alberto, 33, 52n1, 238n6, 240n30 and n45, 254–255, 270n43 and n45, 399n26, 402n59, 505
totality, 19-21, 31-35, 40-49, 58, 62, 87, 109, 141, 146-149, 153, 158, 160, 164, 165, 169, 179, 188, 198, 225-237, 246, 274-286, 292, 293, 296, 335, 336, 353, 363, 373, 382, 385, 390, 417-423, 448-452, 456, 506-513, 518n1, 531, 537, 537, 553, 560
transfeminism, 52n37, 425–440, 458n2
Tronti, Mario, 43, 241–272, 536

Union Générale d'Éditions *See* 10/18
urbanism 259
use-value, 59n4, 83, 85, 87, 99, 112, 114, 116, 125n2, 134, 157, 162, 172n18, 202, 316, 330, 342, 345, 378, 388, 390, 453, 455, 478, 479, 501, 502, 551

value, 33, 40, 48, 50n12, 62, 74, 75, 78, 81n4, 85, 89, 90, 94, 98, 99-102, 105, 112, 125n2, 130, 143, 147, 161, 162, 173n28, 176, 205, 217, 220-230, 249, 266, 269, 274, 296n11, 326-329, 331, 333, 334-339, 343-347, 354, 367-399, 405, 429-455, 460n26, 470, 472, 473, 479, 485, 497, 501-503, 510, 514, 517, 532, 550, 553, 557, 558
value criticism, *See Wertkritik*
value form, 145, 217, 221, 228-240, 268n7, 272n102, 296n11n14, 335-338, 342, 392, 403-405, 465, 514, 538
Virno, Paolo, 389
Vishmidt, Marina, 45, 52n34, 397n1, 405n92, 445, 447, 558, 559

Watson, Bill, 189, 190, 193, 214n4, 542
wages, 36, 111–112, 262, 263–264, 320, 352, 370-371, 400n32, 405n94, 482n7, 555
Wages for Housework, 264–265, 352, 371, 549
Wertkritik, Value criticism, 423 *See also* Neue Marx-Lektüre
Wilderson III, Frank B., 19, 49n3, 52n37, 445, 446, 458
Wittig, Monique, 425, 428, 429, 434, 440n6, 440n7, 445
workerism *See also Operaismo*, 243, 271n76
workers councils, *See* Councils
Wright, Steve, 269n22, 272n108, 543, 561n3 and n4

Zerzan, John, 189–195, 542

End Notes

32. **Sacha Kahir**

33. **What Is to Be Undone under Real Subsumption?**

34. Magical Nominalism

35.'Capital is a sort of cabalistic word like church or state, or any other of those general terms which are invented by those who fleece the rest of mankind to conceal the hand that shears them' – *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital* etc, London, 1825 (pamphlet written by Neo-Ricardian economist Thomas Hodgskin in the guise of an unnamed labourer)

36. We see vast numbers. Made up of postal workers from innumerable lands. Delivering the message that only on the day preceding total extinction, will the messiah arrive, purposely rendering all future redemption as pointless?

36. These messengers are paid in a currency mimicking the American dollar bill. Though, rather than bearing the one eyed pyramid, in its place is the image of a flat star-shaped spool for thread, wrapped in old broken-off bits of fabric, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied kind and colours. At its centre is a wooden cross with an adjoining metallic rod pivoted at a right angle. Blazoned across this image is the word Odradek.

91. As Kafka noted in 'Cares Of a Family Man': 'Some say the word Odradek is of Slavonic origin, and try to account for it on that basis. Others again believe it to be of German origin, only influenced by Slavonic.'

92. Both currencies contain the words: 'Novus Ordo Seclorum (A New Order for the Ages)', and 'E pluribus unum (Out of many, One).' But the eagle is replaced by the image of a turkey, as Benjamin Franklin had originally intended. The turkey is indigenous to the Americas. The origin of the name of this bird carries as much speculation to it as that of 'Odradek'. The words *Annuit cœptis* on both currencies translates as 'favoured undertakings (by God)', however annuit on its own means a nod or wink of approval.

93. The image of the all-seeing-eye of god is poised to wink…

94. **Weird Tales of the Fearful Fetishises of the Petty Bourgeoisie Family Man**

95. Odradek is an object-like being whose existence causes the anonymous 'family man', who narrates Kafka's famous short story, much concern. In fact this object-like being seems central to all the cares of the eponymous narrator. Just as the origin of the name itself is shrouded in mystery, so are the origins of the being and ends to which it serves, as it stalks the hallways, stairwells, and shadows outside the family abode. To the concerned patriarch the star shaped spindle-like creature appears broken or incomplete despite a kind of threaded together but fathomless perfection. Apart from divulging its name and that it's 'of no fixed abode' Odradek only offers up a lung-less laughter that sounds like 'dried leaves rustling'. The family man fears this creature will outlive him and all his descendants.

Some have speculated that Kafka's tale manifests certain aspects of what Marx termed the 'social hieroglyphics' of commodity relations, the strange hermetic language of commodities circulating, which imbues our world with meaning and values. Where, according to Marx 'not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects. We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value'. Marx talks of the 'ghostly objectivity' and 'sensuous supersensuousness' of this relationship.

Or, is Odradek in fact the anti-commodity, without use or exchange value, which makes the entity so unfathomable to the Bourgeois consciousness of the narrator?

95. Value and the Commodity Form as Noumena (Thing-in-itself), Manifested in Petty Bourgeoisie Consciousness as Anti-Semitic Mythology, UFOology and Other Conspiracy Theories, p.32

96. **We were never primitive**

97. We seek to invoke various spirits, angels and demons as sigils and cyphers of the commodity relations under which we're subsumed. To unbind, unravel, disenchant and ward off the evil eye. Some of these cyphers might be regarded as embodying what Rilke, while writing under the patronage of an heiress to the Thurn & Taxis dynasty – owners of the first transnational postal service – termed 'the bureaucracy of angels.' While other entities represent the unruly and demonic rabble that bureaucracies attempt to subdue.

99. Eduard Lachmann, 'Der Engel in Rilkes Duineser Elegien', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, XXVII [1953], 427f. compares Rilke's angels with the court clerks and the hierarchical bureaucracy in Kafka's novels

99. 'Which side are you on? If you come to Harlan County, there is no neutral line.'

99. 'Everything is inherently contradictory.' – Hegel

98. **Amon, Aamon, Amun, Amen, Atum, Aten, Akhenaten, ah hem...A is for...**

99. **Amon** is believed to be the first monotheistic god, abstract and formless, though sometimes represented as an Ankh Cross or flat sun-like disc. Amon was the god of the Hyksos ('Υκσώς, 'Υξώς), the 'foreign' administrative class that ruled Egypt during the Middle Kingdom (2050–1652 BC). According to SMRD – an infamous pupil of the poet Yates – 'Aamon procureth feuds and reconcileth controversies between friends.' Aamon speaks through a negotiation of sulphuric vomit on parchment. Some Brexiters and Anti-Globalists believe the Hyksos have continued to exist in the form of the OrdoLiberals of Brussels. The Hyksos are also depicted as an invisible foreign power influencing events in the opening sequence of *Unsichtbare Gegner* (Invisible Adversaries), a film by Valie Export, 1976. A disembodied radio announcement in a male voice warns, 'Anyone can be a Hyksos and not know it. You are contagious. You are alone.' The radio announcement itself is already contaminated by an alien presence, amplifying aggression. On YouTube the Hyksos are depicted as black, or Jewish, or as Black Israelites, or as White Israelites, or as imposters of the above, or whatever is deemed alien, or powerful, according to various prejudices. For the grey on grey alien view of a benevolent Neo-Hyksos see Max Weber. Also see Weber for the disenchantment of the world and the myth of disenchantment.

99. **A is for ASBO (Bringer of Silence to the Estates and Schemes)**
99. **B is for Brigitte…**

99. **Mama Brigitte:** only Loa of mixed ancestral descent (Irish, African, Haitian).
Foul mouthed, drunken, venomous
The Guardian Angle, The Cutting Angel
The mother- tongue- splits- snake- like-twists – arms – back- hand – bag – spits- pepper- spray **AND** rum -fumes…
Goddess of
Life and Death entwined
Fertility and Cemeteries, Crossroads and Gravestones
Obscenities and Elective Affinities
Syncretic host to cathartic drunken boasts
Protection from ASBOS, standing ten toes against all foes
99. **M.E.L.T - 'Monetary Expression**

of Labour Time'
99. **W.A.S.T.E – We Await Silently Trystero's Empire**
99. **M.A.R.X – Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug System**

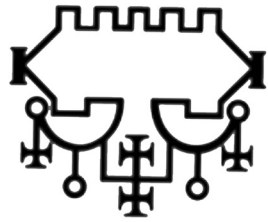
99. **M.A.R.X – Michigan Adaptive Resource Exchange**99. **M.A.R.X – Model of AXAF (Advanced X-ray Astrophysics Facility) Response to X-Rays *(simulation)***

100. **Re-bite**
100. **Prometheus Rimorso (Remorse, Regret, Bitten again on the same spot)**

101. According to Kafka there were at least four variations to the myth of Prometheus. Firstly Prometheus, as is commonly known, was condemned to spend eternity chained to rocks, while eagles devoured his infinitely self-renewing liver. A punishment from the gods for stealing fire and handing it to mortals, thereby unleashing progress, from lighting up the night, to forging bronze, to building nuclear bombs. In the second variation Prometheus submerges into the rock to escape the pain. In the third, Prometheus, the gods, and the birds completely forget the reason for this never-ending torture, becoming automatons set in perpetual motion. In the fourth a kind of weariness dulls all affect 'everyone grew weary of what had become meaningless. The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily.' Prometheus, the gods, the wounds and the birds of prey became a kind landscape.

102. – Franz Kafka, 'Prometheus', The Blue Octavia Notebooks, (Ed.) Max Brod, (Trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithine Wilkins), Cambridge: Exact Change, 1991, p.36.

103. Mnm – Mithras
103. Mithras was a Vedic deity presiding over scales and measurements.



104. Belial: בְּלִיַּעַל (bel-e-yah'-al) is translated into English as worthless or without profit. The children of the devil are worthless. בְּלִיַּעַל (Samuel 2:12-21)

104. Mithras later became popular with the Roman Proletariat morphing into a solar deity. The Proletariat was a category used in Roman censuses to demark landless citizens who could only show 1100 assēs or less (Roman currency) at the census. However, their offspring (proles), particualry males, could be counted as property, forming the lowest rung of the Roman Legion. As soldiers bought their own weaponary, proletarian soldiers often entering battle with spears at best, engaging in hand to hand combat. Or, carrying, feeding and making the things needed for an advancing army. These footsoldiers made up the backbone of the Roman army, their reproduction fueling the expanding reproduction of the Roman Empire. Mithras is often depicted murdering a bull (seen as representing the father and the moon), this acting as a social / familial release valve.

103. The City of London Mithraeum (under the Bloomsberg building) showed a correlation between visiting the site and procuring cheap beef at a nearby Waitrose.

Remember the worship of Mithras equals good meaty value for your hungry warrior.

Also see the Smurfs...

104. **HAM STRAINED TENDON GETS HOURLY RATE GUARENTEED,**

APPLY WITHIN.

104. **Och is for…**

105. Ochún is a syncretic deity of Santeria, who demands animal sacrifices. In 2019, over 9.2 billion broiler chickens, weighing 58.3 billion pounds, liveweight, were produced. (Broiler Chicken Industry Key Facts 2019). Daily millions of women stand shoulder to shoulder debeaking chickens, so these birds crammed together don't peck each other to death. However, Ochún starves under this soulless massacre. There is no magic in the factory.

106. 'I remember talking to an old cannibal who from missionary and administrator had heard news of the Great War raging then in Europe. What he was most curious to know was how we Europeans managed to eat such enormous quantities of human flesh, as the casualties of a battle seemed to imply. When I told him indignantly that Europeans do not eat their slain foes, he looked at me with real horror and asked me what sort of barbarians we were to kill without any real object.' Here in Bronislaw Malinowski's anecdote we can see the taboos of the cannibal as a kind of limit, a law we are unbound from. But, should we refashion ourselves with new taboos or drive the unbinding and death of the aura... fart…parp…etc… etc…

But,
If this limit/taboo were to be industrialised, then would have…

… Cathedral-factories lined the battlefields.
Inside an assembly of Priestly-Pie-Maker-Generals

… Every cathedral-factory lined by field hospitals
Inside an assembly line of Butcher-Nurse-Workers

107. FOR THE
108. OFF

109. CUTS

110. MEA CULPA / MEA GULPA

111. **THE OWL OF MINERVA EATS ITS YOUNG.**

Cut to generic people trying to fall asleep.
The intertitles say it's the year 2001.
They are attempting to fall asleep by counting all the chickens in the world,
It's taken them several months, fed intravenously…
'14.4 billion and one.'

Cut to generic people trying to fall asleep.
The inter-titles say it's the year 2018.
They are attempting to fall asleep by counting all the chickens in the world,
It's taken them several months, fed intravenously
23.7 billion and one.

112. **HEGEL HUNGRY-BELLY**
THE MOVING COLLAPSING SPIRALING ALL DEVOURING DIALECTIC

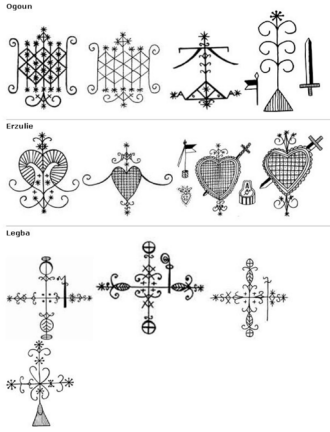
113. IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

114. The entity focuses on the number of births per woman in a population.
Unlike the big brain in your skull, the entity can't balance your chequebook or compose a love note.
The entity may trigger big emotional shifts experienced by people coping with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and functional bowel problems such as constipation, diarrhea, bloating, pain and stomach upset.

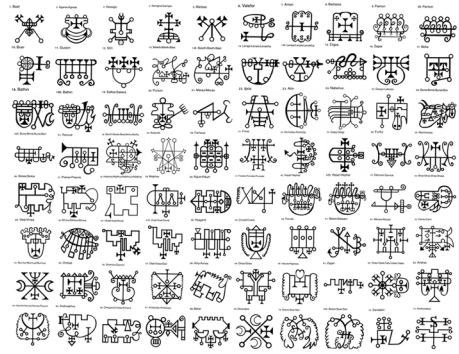
115. REGAIN LOST MOMENTS, LAUGHTER, SUMMERS, AND NAMELESS MEMORIES WHILE STRENGTHENING JAW MUSLCES. BIRTHED GRAYNESS NO LONGER A PROBLEM, UNLOVABLE OR YOUR MONEY BACK.

116. *EXCESS: THE FACTORY* (*L'excès- l'usine*) – Leslie Kaplan

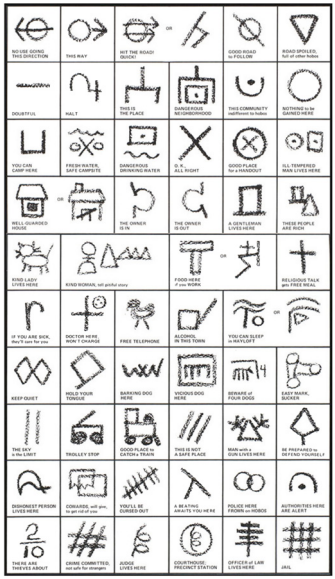
117. The factory is immense, but the immensity is in pieces; we are in an infinity divided into pieces. This is what Leslie Kaplan teaches me, far from Pascal: the infinite, but the infinite in pieces. Discontinuity has done its work. One lives, one dies: Is this 'true' death? Only fatigue, useless work, the truth disarticulated at every moment. – Maurice Blanchot



118. Death like history breaks down into images. The symbols on cemetery gates next to the factory canteen.



120. The bureaucracy of angels and demons. Deities that would grant access to the ghost dimension and post-apocalyptical pension schemes.



119. The invisible postal network. A cryptic language used by hobos in the 1920s.

In the apocalypse before
the apocalypse: melting monuments.

I got lost in the wilderness
And was wondering
If this state

Would last forever? My tears were made of
Plastic rubbish? My sweat coagulate
Emissions? My body huge?

Metres upon metres
Swimming in
Pools

Forever, and just then
I heard a voice, a star, Ariana Grande, who took my
Hand and led me, to look!

Over the city (which hardly deserved that name,
Cos one of the major problems of capitalism was that
its cities
Weren't big enough!)

And said why are you here all by yourself
Crying on a park bench?
Can you even see anything from here?

It was true, no: not inside-out enough.
What I had taken for my tears was neon turquoise
landscape
Fog running down my cheeks.

And she said why don't you come IN????
Don't worry – being IN it is not being UNDER it.
This is not a building,

We can start.

What Resembles the Grave but Isn't – Always falling into a hole, then saying 'ok, this is not your grave, get out of this hole' getting out of the hole which is not the grave, falling into a hole again, saying 'ok, this is also not your grave, get out of this hole', getting out of that hole, falling into another one; sometimes falling into a hole within a hole, or many holes within holes, getting out of them one after the other, then falling again, saying 'this is not your grave, get out of the hole'; sometimes being pushed, saying 'you can not push me into this hole, it is not my grave' and getting out defiantly, then falling into a hole again without any pushing; sometimes falling into a set of holes whose structures are predictable, ideological, and long dug, often falling into this set of structural and impersonal holes; sometimes falling into holes with other people, with other people, saying 'this is not our mass grave, get out of this hole', all together getting out of the hole together, hands and legs and arms and human ladders of each other to get out of the hole that is not the mass grave but that will only be gotten out of together; sometimes the wilful-falling into a hole which is not the grave because it is easier than not falling into a hole really, but then once in it, realising it is not the grave, getting out of the hole eventually; sometimes falling into a hole and languishing there for days, weeks, months, years, because while not the grave very difficult, still, to climb out of and you know after this hole there's just another and another; sometimes surveying the landscape of holes and wishing for a high quality final hole; sometimes thinking of who has fallen into holes which are not graves but might be better if they were; sometimes too ardently contemplating the final hole while trying to avoid the provisional ones; sometimes dutifully falling and getting out, with perfect fortitude, saying 'look at the skill and spirit with which I rise from that which resembles the grave but isn't!

Minor Compositions